

strip healthcare away from millions of women.

The GOP fights against contraception access. Many in the GOP fight against comprehensive sex education. Instead, they push abstinence-only sex education curricula that doesn't work. If the GOP succeeds in killing the ACA and in reducing contraception access, the number of unplanned pregnancies will increase, and the abortion rate will increase. How is that pro-life?

The GOP is now embracing a different strategy—making women and doctors criminals. This is the key unifying cruelty to these recent State laws. GOP-controlled States are racing to see who can have the cruelest criminal laws—a complete ban on abortion at 8 weeks of pregnancy. No, how about a complete ban on abortion at 6 weeks of pregnancy?

In Alabama, there is a ban from the second the pregnancy begins, from the second there is a fetus in utero, and there are no exceptions to someone who is the victim of rape or incest. Think about that. Alabama forces a 13-year-old who was raped or was the victim of incest to bear a criminal's child under pain of criminal prosecution and punishment—imprisonment—for the doctor.

Wait. Let's get tougher still.

In Georgia, women who terminate pregnancies could receive life in prison under a bill that was recently signed by the Georgia Governor. There is some confusion here. Prosecutors argue about whether the technical language would subject a woman who has an abortion to a first-degree murder charge. The sponsor of the bill, now that it has been signed, is backpedaling, saying he only intended for women to be prosecuted under a separate criminal abortion statute that carries a maximum sentence of 10 years. He apparently believes that subjecting women to 10-year prison sentences rather than to life sentences for murder is merciful and lenient. No woman exercising her constitutional right to make her own healthcare decisions should be threatened with a prison sentence of even 1 day.

The GOP could go further.

A Texas bill filed last month would have allowed the death penalty—capital punishment—for a woman who seeks an abortion. The bill failed, but the bill wasn't a surprise from the party whose President admitted during his campaign that a woman who has an abortion must suffer a punishment.

So the GOP's strategy is for more criminal laws, more prosecutions, and more sentences—put more women in prison, and put more doctors in prison. We already have the highest incarceration in the world—five times higher than Canada's and 70 percent higher than Russia's. Guess what. So many of these GOP proposals would push us even further, and the next big group going behind bars could be women and doctors.

These criminal laws don't bring about a culture of life. These criminal

laws don't bring about a culture of compassion. They succeed only in demonizing women, robbing them of their dignity, and intruding upon the most private aspects of their lives, and they demonize the doctors who care for these women.

Do Americans want a society that labels women's healthcare choices as criminal? No.

Is there any proof that criminal penalties for abortion will reduce unplanned pregnancies? No.

Is there any proof that criminal penalties for abortion will reduce the number of abortions? No.

That is what I mean about the choice we face as a society. We can pursue a path of compassion toward women and be secure in the knowledge that better health and contraception access and comprehensive sex education will reduce unplanned pregnancies and abortions, or we can pursue the path of criminalizing women's decisions with there being no evidence that the strategy will have the effect of reducing unplanned pregnancies and abortions.

I have focused most of my attention on the issue of unplanned pregnancies. Of course, some planned pregnancies end in abortion, too. Most often, these pregnancies involve severe maternal or severe fetal health issues that are emotional and tragic for all involved. Certainly, compassion toward these families and not criminal prosecution is the right answer. This question—do we use a compassionate strategy to reduce unplanned pregnancies or do we criminalize women's decisions?—is the fundamental difference between the Nation's two political parties on this very important issue right now.

I am firmly in the camp of compassion. If we support women and trust women, we can keep making significant progress toward a goal we should all share: fewer unplanned pregnancies and fewer abortions.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, let me say how much I agree with the Senator from Virginia. I endorse completely what he said. I would make one amendment. Instead of just the compassion approach versus the criminal approach, it is the commonsense approach versus the criminal approach as well.

I do believe that the point has been made and demonstrated by what my colleague said here and what he has said in previous meetings that when we invest in family planning and sex education and good healthcare for women, we have fewer unplanned pregnancies and fewer abortions, period. Those policies that militate against that just increase the likelihood of abortion.

Let me also add something that I think pro-life and pro-choice should agree to come to terms with in unity. How in the world can we live in a country—the United States of America—with all its wealth and all its expertise,

and have in the last 25 years the worst incidence of maternal mortality in civilized countries around the world? More women are dying in the United States giving birth today than 25 years ago. Whether you are pro-life or pro-choice, wouldn't you agree this should be a high priority of our government—both parties—to reduce maternal mortality here in the United States?

I might add that infant mortality is still unacceptable in the United States. The rate of it is unacceptable.

Couldn't we agree, pro-life and pro-choice, to come together behind those two?

I am a cosponsor of a bill introduced by Congresswoman ROBIN KELLY of Illinois that she aptly entitled the "MOMMA Act," which will try to deal with maternal mortality issues, particularly as they relate to women of color. And the irony, the surprise is that when you read the data, the incidence of maternal mortality among women of color does not track with poverty and education. It is a racial issue for reasons that are hard to explain, but she addresses it, and I have joined her in that effort.

The other point I would like to make is this: My colleague from Virginia has talked about efforts in State legislatures that have gone to extremes. What I call the Alabama two-step is the second step in that process.

We spend our time day after day, week after week putting men and women on the bench who were proposed by the Trump administration and pushed through as quickly as possible by the Republicans in the Senate who, frankly, are waiting for the day when they will have a chance to endorse, approve these statutes my colleague has described, which are extreme by any definition. That, to me, is problematic and troublesome for us as a nation, that we are moving toward that possibility.

I see that the Senator from South Dakota is on floor, and I believe he has a request to make.

I would like to ask unanimous consent, after his request, to be recognized again.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—S. 151

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at 12:45 p.m. today, the Senate proceed to legislative session to consider Calendar No. 94, S. 151; I further ask that the committee-reported substitute amendment be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read a third time, and the Senate vote on passage of the bill, as amended, with no intervening action or debate; finally, that if passed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

IRAN

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I see another colleague on the floor, so I will make my comments brief.

We had a briefing this week in a room in the Capitol that the public is not allowed to enter; it is called the SCIF. It was a briefing that is given to Members of the Senate of top-secret, classified information. It related to the situation in which we now find ourselves in relation to Iran.

It was troubling to hear the comments being made by the leaders of the Trump administration—the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State, as well as military leaders and leaders in the intelligence community.

You see, what we are engaging in in the United States is a confrontation with Iran. We are moving toward that. It started with this President's insistence that the United States step away from a treaty entered into by the Obama administration to stop the development of nuclear weapons in Iran.

What President Obama succeeded in doing over many years of diplomatic effort was to come to the table with Iran—an enemy of the United States on many fronts—and to reach an agreement where there would be international inspectors with free access to Iran to make certain they did not develop nuclear weapons. We believed—the world believed that Iran with nuclear weapons would be a danger to the region, a danger to our ally Israel, and even a danger to the United States.

The coalition put together by President Obama was nothing short of remarkable. You wouldn't be surprised to learn the coalition included the United Kingdom, our traditional ally, but it also included Germany, France, the European Union, Russia, and China. Russia and China. All came to the table and agreed on it.

Did it work? International inspectors came and reported to Members of Congress over and over that there were no locked doors, no areas where access was denied, and that they could say with virtual certainty that Iran was living up to the terms of this agreement.

So what did this President, President Trump, decide to do? He canceled U.S. participation in the agreement. Why? Why would he believe that the development of nuclear weapons in Iran is in the best interest of anyone? Yet he did. He followed that with even more provocative efforts in relation to Iran when it came to categorizing the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization—a step that moved even closer to provocation and confrontation. And then, of course, we decided to send our own military closer in to Iran itself. A carrier group was dispatched to that region.

What is behind all this? Why is it that we are escalating the situation

with Iran? The President has been equivocal in trying to explain it, but his National Security Advisor, John Bolton, has not. John Bolton is a hawk. His position and his posture when it comes to military confrontation was so controversial that in a previous administration, he was denied the position of Ambassador to the United Nations because of statements he had made. Now he is the top national security advisor to the President of the United States. He has written articles pleading for confrontation with Iran on a military basis.

Rumors fly out of the Pentagon—this morning's Washington Post suggestion that we are already sending 10,000 more military advisors into the region; a rumor 2 weeks ago that there was a contingency plan for 120,000 American troops. I might add that the Secretary of Defense, in my office this morning, denied both of these, but the fact is, more and more information is tumbling out about a confrontation with Iran.

I will tell you that some of us—a handful of us in the Senate—were here on the Senate floor when we debated and voted on a war in Iraq. It was 18 years ago. We were given information by the Bush administration and particularly Vice President Cheney about the danger of Iraq to the United States of America, to the point where a vote came to the floor, and the Senate approved an invasion of Iraq.

I remember that night. I remember it well. Twenty-three of us—one Republican and twenty-two Democrats—joined together in voting no. It may have been the most important and maybe the best vote I believe I ever cast as a Member of the Senate.

It was a foreign policy mistake to invade Iraq. What followed was a tragedy. We have spent billions and billions of American taxpayers' dollars in that country. We have lost over 4,000 American lives in Iraq, and over 30,000 or 40,000 came home with serious injuries, including my colleague in the Senate, Senator TAMMY DUCKWORTH. We have paid so dearly for that mistake.

The weapons of mass destruction we were sent in to destroy did not exist. What was told to the American people about the danger of Iraq was false—false. We are still there today, 18 years later, as we are in Afghanistan—the two longest wars in the history of the United States of America. Is there anyone who believed when we voted on the Senate floor that we were voting for the longest war in the history of the United States?

Now this administration, the Trump administration, is tempted to draw us into another war in the Middle East. The question is whether Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives will abide by the constitutional responsibility and demand that the American people, through our voices, have something to say about this decision.

If the American people are ready for a war in Iran, I would be shocked. As I

travel around the State of Illinois and other parts of this country, I find no sentiment for the United States to engage in another war at this moment in our history. I also find most people believing that the provocative and confrontational efforts of the Trump administration are drawing us nearer to that day.

So we leave now for a week. We will be back, but what will happen in the 7 or 8 days we are gone? I worry about that based on the briefings we have been given and the appetite of John Bolton and others in this administration to move us into war.

We should not invade Iran. We should not engage in another invasion in the Middle East. We should not subject America's young men and young women to the possibility of military service in another war that can go on indefinitely. There are better ways to deal with this. Let's rely on diplomacy and direct negotiation. Let's work with our allies to bring a peaceable result here and to stop activity which we know Iran is engaged in which is objectionable. It can be done short of invasion, short of military force, and short of war.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I give heartfelt thanks to my colleague from Illinois for bringing the experience of his service in the Senate and his deliberate study of the challenges of international affairs to bear on the gravity of the current situation where a policy has brought us to the brink of conflict and we have no confidence that there is wise judgment being exercised at this moment to ensure that there is not a war.

I thank him for sharing the journey that he has been a part of and that this Chamber has been part of and ringing the alarm bell that at this moment, we have two key foreign policy advisors—our Secretary of State and our National Security Advisor—who prefer weapons over agreements, who have driven a strategy of maximum pressure designed to make life extraordinarily difficult in Iran, to undo all the international work of the previous years to end the nuclear program in that country, and who are talking as if a conflict somewhere—maybe an Iranian militia in Iraq—should be a trigger to a massive war, which is why we are so worried about leaving this Chamber for even a day.

I thank him for raising his voice and sharing his experience.

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Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I come to the floor because I am losing a key member of my foreign policy team who has wrestled with the issues of the Middle East and who has been engaged in the dialogue and conversation about a smart policy to end nuclear proliferation.