

have seen that this President, President Trump, views civil servants as his adversaries.

The President has sought to silence those whose work or words contradict him, even when the facts are clear. We saw that most recently when the National Weather Service tried to calm residents in the State of Alabama after President Trump falsely stated that Hurricane Dorian would put them at severe risk. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross reportedly threatened to fire the agency's leadership after they corrected the President's false statements about Hurricane Dorian and Alabama. Just within the last hour, the New York Times is reporting that the order to change the statements at NOAA came directly from the White House in the form of a directive from the Acting Chief of Staff to the President, Mick Mulvaney.

We have also seen this pattern at other times. We saw President Trump standing side by side with Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, while President Trump sided with Putin's claims about noninterference in the 2016 Presidential elections, and where President Trump threw our own U.S. intelligence agency experts under the bus.

These assaults on the Federal civil service and the efforts to undermine the integrity of the Federal civil service have also included an assault on Federal employees. This administration knows that workers are stronger when they are organized and have representatives who can speak on their behalf. Many—not all, but many—of the Trump agency heads have repeatedly refused to comply with the law and to bargain in good faith with their workers. Instead of trying to negotiate, they have tried to impose contracts and terms unilaterally. This has already happened at the Social Security Administration, where agency management has shown particular hostility to the unions representing their workforce. Some of these issues are now tied up in the courts, but I would hope we could work on a bipartisan basis to address these challenges.

Now, President Trump is trying to abolish the Office of Personnel Management. That brings me to the nomination of Ms. Cabaniss, because she will be directed to preside over the dismantlement of the agency—that is, if the President has his way. I know those of us in Congress with a different view will be weighing in as well.

The Office of Personnel Management is an independent Federal agency with an absolutely vital mission—to strengthen and protect the Federal civil service system. Their role is to protect the integrity of our Federal civil service and prevent it from being hijacked by political forces.

I know there has been a lot of talk that this is all about civil service reform. As I look at the proposals, I don't see it that way. I see these proposals as an attack on the institution that defends our civil service system.

The Office of Personnel Management needs a strong, independent leader who will protect the Federal workforce from partisan interference and defend agencies from the administration's attacks. After looking at Ms. Cabaniss's record, she is not the right person to lead OPM. When she chaired the Federal Labor Relations Authority, morale was dead last among small Federal agencies. That is the agency that is supposed to resolve disputes between Federal workers and management, but 55 percent of their decisions were overturned under Ms. Cabaniss's jurisdiction.

OPM's mission is vital to the success of our Federal civil service and their ability to deliver services to the American people. We need a leader who is going to stand up for the integrity of that system, not one who is going to preside over the dismantlement of that agency. So I hope we can work on a bipartisan basis to ensure that this country preserves one of its vital assets, which is a nonpartisan civil service.

Presidents come and Presidents go, and Presidents, of course, give direction to the different agencies, but we will be doing a great disservice to the people of this country if we allow political cronyism to seep into this system and create an environment where people fear speaking out, telling the truth, and providing the facts.

I want to take this opportunity today, as we discuss the nomination of the Office of Personnel Management, to raise that larger issue, and I hope we will be united in that effort because lots of countries around the world suffer from political cronyism. The United States has helped shield itself from that by establishing decades and decades ago a system that tries to immunize ourselves against that kind of political infection in terms of the day-to-day work that we ask people to do and carry on, on behalf of the American people. Let's work together to accomplish what I believe is a bipartisan goal.

I yield the remainder of my time.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROMNEY). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REMEMBERING SEPTEMBER 11TH

Mr. JONES. Mr. President, before I get into the substance of what I want to talk about, I am going to take my own personal opportunity to remember those whom we lost 18 years ago today. Like everyone else, I remember the events. I was at home with my family and young children, not knowing what was going to happen and seeing things happen. I can remember taking one of my kids to daycare when the second tower collapsed and the radio announcer simply saying, "They are both gone," and the emptiness we felt.

We remember today, we honor today, and we honor not only those whom we lost but honor those responders who were there and who still suffer the pain from having to deal with all of that.

FUTURE ACT

Mr. President, I rise today almost a year ago since I first came to the Senate floor to discuss the state of our Nation's historically Black colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions.

As I did then, and many times since, I am again making an urgent call to colleagues to act. At the end of this month, at the end of the fiscal year, nearly half of all Federal funds these schools receive each year, and have for a long time, is going to end. That is \$255 million annually that they have had available to count on for well over a decade. That is going to come to a screeching halt if we don't act, and we need to act now.

These historic institutions serve nearly 4 million students of color. Many of our Nation's brightest minds have matriculated at these institutions. HBCUs are the leading educators for African-American PhDs in science and engineering. They are foundational to building generational wealth in communities that have long faced headwinds in doing so. They are doing amazing work. They are doing incredible work with very limited resources and with their own individual financial headwinds to contend with.

In Alabama, we are home to 14 HBCUs—more than any State in the country—so they are an integral part of my home State's higher education system. Just as important, they are integral to the economy of Alabama.

Minority-serving institutions play a central role in America's higher education system. For example, Hispanic-Serving Institutions account for 13 percent of all nonprofit colleges. Yet they enroll 62 percent of all Hispanic students.

More than 75 percent of students at HBCUs and nearly 80 percent of students at Tribal colleges and universities receive Pell grants, compared to only 32 percent of all students. These schools have a very serious purpose for these kids who otherwise might get shut out, likely would get shut out of our higher education system. They are so important, and they face such strong headwinds financially to achieve.

Last year, we held our first HBCU summit where we brought all of our HBCUs in Alabama together to talk about the challenges, to talk about what they were facing but also to talk about opportunities to work together, to work with the State, to work with the Congress, to try to meet the challenges of our workforce of the 21st century, to try to meet the challenges of our educational system in general. What I saw was an amazing group of people—amazing group of people who were doing the work for their students and for their communities, people who

are committed from deep down in their heart. They love these kids. They love the purpose they are serving, and they are thinking ahead. They are thinking outside the box. These are not institutions that are so cookie cutter that they are not willing to explore new opportunities for their students. They are seizing every one of those opportunities.

I have seen firsthand, though, increasing concern from our HBCU community. Given their significance, it is frustrating that some of these schools continue to struggle. Public and private HBCUs face extensive capital project needs but have few funding sources to rely on.

On top of that, the Government Accountability Office found that HBCUs' average endowment is half the size of a similar sized non-HBCU. We have to change that. We have to make sure we provide to these schools because the bottom line is, they have no safety net. They struggle. They work. They do the things. The bottom line is, they have no safety net. If they have no safety net, neither do the students they serve.

This time last year, I was talking about legislation I had introduced called the Strengthening Minority-Serving Institutions Act, which would have permanently extended and increased mandatory funding to all minority-serving institutions. That bill was supported by one-quarter of the Senate. Unfortunately, it was simply all Democrats. We could not get the bipartisan support that I hope we will get in the future. However, now we are here and only have 19 days left in the fiscal year, and these schools still have no certainty about whether these critical funds will continue to be available.

We hear a lot in this body about the need to make sure we continue to fund government, that we continue to fund our military, and about how devastating even a continuing resolution might be to the Defense Department because it doesn't allow the military to plan. I agree with that. I see it. This is \$255 million that all of a sudden is going to be cut off completely from schools that have relied on it, that have planned, that have done their budgets around it. We owe it to them. We owe it to them to make sure that we get this funding because they give so much back to us.

Ensuring equal access to quality education should not be a partisan issue, and I worked over the last year to find a solution that I think should receive and could receive broad bipartisan support. I believe we have that in the Fostering Undergraduate Talent by Unlocking Resources for Education Act. It is called the FUTURE Act, which I have introduced with my colleague Senator TIM SCOTT and Representatives ALMA ADAMS and MARK WALKER in the House.

The FUTURE Act reauthorizes funding for the next 2 fiscal years, maintaining just level funding of \$255 million a year. It is the least we could do.

Our bill checks all the boxes. It helps institutions in 43 States. It is bipartisan, it is bicameral, and it is paid for.

Let's not delay any longer. With this important bill, let's get this to the floor. Let's come up with something so we can show the American people how important these institutions are and just as important, we show the American people that, doggone it, we can get something done. That is the most frustrating part I heard about when I went back to Alabama over the recess: When are you going to get something done, Jones?

Well, it is difficult. You all know it. It is difficult, but this is a piece of legislation that ought to receive support in this body and across the aisle, across the Capitol in the House.

This week we have a lot of the HBCU presidents and administrators who are on Capitol Hill. They are coming up for their own benefit but also for the Congressional Black Caucus events that are later this week. They are here on the Hill. It would be the perfect time to get this to the floor. I don't see it on the schedule anywhere, but it would be the perfect time.

As people are looking here, as they are watching us and listening to us, they know we support their institutions. Let's show them we support their institutions.

I urge my colleagues to support the FUTURE Act. Get onboard with us. Sponsor this legislation and, in turn, support our Nation's minority-serving institutions of higher education. Their graduates deserve the same quality education as any other student, and they deserve a fair shot at a successful future. Let's get this done. Let's do our job and get this done.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

#### BACKGROUND CHECKS

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I am going to be joined on the floor over the course of about an hour or so by Members of the Senate who are desperate for our colleagues to wake up and recognize that the time for action to quell the epidemic of gun violence in this country is now. It was also last week. It was also a month ago and a year ago and 6 years ago. It was also nearly 7 years ago, after the shooting in my State of Connecticut that felled 20 little 6- and 7-year-olds attending first grade at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

We tend to pay attention to the mass shootings—the ones in Odessa, El Paso, Dayton, and Newtown—but every single day in this country, 93 people die from gunshot wounds. Most of those are suicides, but many of them are homicides, and others are accidental shootings. When you total it up, we are losing about 33,000 people every year from gun violence and gunshot wounds.

Those numbers may not be that meaningful to you because it is a big country, but how does that compare to the rest of the world or at least the

rest of the high-income world? Well, that is about 10 times higher than other countries of similar income and of similar situation as the United States. Something different is happening here. It is not that we have more mental illness. It is not that we have less mental health treatment. It is not that we have less resources going into law enforcement. The difference is that we have guns spread out all over this Nation, many of them illegal and many of them of a caliber and capacity that were designed for the military in which this slaughter becomes predictable. We have a chance to do something about it right now in the U.S. Congress. We have a chance to try to find some way to come together over some commonsense measures.

I just got off the phone—a 40-minute conversation with the President of the United States. I was glad that he was willing to take that amount of time with me, Senator MANCHIN, and Senator TOOMEY to talk about whether we can figure out a way to get Republicans and Democrats on board with a proposal to expand background checks to more gun sales in this Nation. In particular, we were talking about expanding background checks to commercial gun sales. That is certainly not as far as I would like to go, but I understand that part of my job here is to argue for my beliefs and my convictions but then try to find a compromise.

There is no single legislative initiative that will solve all of these issues, but what we know is, if you want to take the biggest bite out of gun crime as quickly as possible, increasing the number of background checks done in this country is the way to go. All we are trying to do here is make sure that when you buy a gun, you prove that you aren't someone with a serious criminal history or that you aren't someone who has a serious history of mental illness.

In 2017, about 170,000 people in this country went into a store, tried to buy a gun, and were denied that sale because they had an offense on their record or a period of time in an inpatient psychiatric unit, which prohibited them from buying a gun. Of those 170,000 sales that were denied, 39 percent of them were convicted felons who had tried to come in and buy a gun, many of them knowing they were likely prohibited from buying those guns.

The problem is, that isn't a barrier to buying a weapon—being denied a sale at a gun store. Why do we know that? It is because just a few weeks ago in Texas, a gunman who went in and shot up 7 people who died and 23 who were injured failed a background check because he had been diagnosed by a clinician as mentally ill and had triggered one of those prohibiting clauses, but then he went and bought the gun from a private seller, knowing that he wouldn't have to go through a background check if he bought the weapon from a place in Texas that didn't have