

that are so essential to America's national security interests.

We have a filibuster being conducted by the Senate Democrats. It needs to be stopped. We need to move forward with the Defense appropriations bill, and I hope the Senate Democrats will come to the conclusion that this is the right thing to do, not only for the Senate but, more importantly, for our country.

FILTER BUBBLE TRANSPARENCY ACT

Madam President, the internet has brought Americans a host of benefits: a wealth of information at our fingertips, unparalleled convenience, new opportunities for education and commerce, and innumerable new methods of communication. But I don't need to tell anyone that along with the countless benefits of the internet have come a number of concerns.

One thing that is on the mind of many consumers is privacy. As the internet gradually permeates every area of our lives, internet companies become the repository for an ever-increasing amount of our personal data and our personal information, from what we ate for dinner last night to the temperature we like to keep in our house.

As chairman of the Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation and the Internet of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, I spent a lot of time focused on data privacy issues. This past June, I convened a hearing entitled "Optimizing for Engagement: Understanding the Use of Persuasive Technology on Internet Platforms."

At that hearing, we heard from a variety of experts about the ways companies use consumers' personal data to determine what individuals see online. As I said at the time, one reason I decided to hold the hearing was to inform legislation I was developing that would require internet platforms to give consumers the option to engage without having the experience shaped by algorithms that are driven by their user-specific data.

Last Thursday, I introduced that legislation, called the Filter Bubble Transparency Act, here in the Senate. I am proud to have a number of bipartisan cosponsors on this bill. Senator BLUMENTHAL, Senator MORAN, Senator BLACKBURN, and Senator WARNER have all cosponsored this legislation, and I am grateful for their support.

The Filter Bubble Transparency Act is designed to address one aspect of the privacy problem, the issues that arise from internet companies' use of consumers' personal information to shape what consumers see on their platforms. Many people are unaware that much of the content they see on the internet is determined by sophisticated algorithms and artificial intelligence that draw on data about each consumer's online activity.

For example, a recent Pew Research Center study found that 53 percent of U.S. adults don't understand how

Facebook News Feed works. Many of us know that Netflix is curating information and recommendations specifically for us based on the movies and the shows that we watch. They use past behavior to project what future behavior is going to be, and they take all that information and they aggregate it. Then, they use that to recommend certain things that we might want to see.

A lot of us are aware that Amazon is delivering product recommendations based on our purchase history. In other words, when you buy things online, you see the ads for the types of things that you buy online. But the reality is that internet companies have moved far beyond just recommending TV shows or just recommending things that you might want to purchase. Increasingly, every aspect of our online experience is personalized based on the vast amount of information that companies collect about us—from our age and occupation to how many times we visit certain websites.

The data used by these companies to make predictions about us comes from a wide range of sources—from smart devices like Alexa, Google Assistant, Ring doorbells, and Nest devices; scanned emails and documents; data acquired from third parties, like banks, credit card processors, and health data services, among many other sources. This data is used to make statistical predictions about how we are going to behave in the future.

This statistical prediction-making is happening on a massive scale. For example, Facebook has stated that it uses for its News Feed can make 6 million predictions per second. Billions of people are being fed content on internet platforms that is basically selected for them by algorithms trying to make predictions about what will keep each user engaged on the platform. Clearly, the powerful mechanisms behind these platforms, meant to enhance engagement, also have the ability, or at least the potential, to influence the thoughts and behaviors, literally, of billions of people.

That is why there is widespread unease about the power of these platforms and why it is important for the public to better understand how these platforms use the information they collect to make predictions about our behavior.

As I said, a significant cause for concern is that most people are not always aware that the information they see is being filtered. We are trapped in what one observer has termed the "filter bubble," our own private world of filtered search results and tailored content, without even knowing that we are there.

There are real concerns that the ever-increasing use of filters to shape our internet experience contributes to political polarization, social isolation, and addiction, as well as permitting companies to manipulate user behavior.

My bill, the Filter Bubble Transparency Act, takes aim at these concerns by requiring major internet platforms to notify consumers that the information they are seeing has been selected for them using filters based on their personal data. It would also require these sites to give consumers the option of seeing unfiltered results.

Twitter provides a good example of what the Filter Bubble Transparency Act will do. Twitter gives consumers an option to view an unfiltered timeline through the use of a prominently displayed icon that is easy to access throughout a user's time on that particular platform. Consumers have the option of viewing the timeline that Twitter has curated for them, which pushes the posts that Twitter thinks they want to see to the top of their feed or viewing an unfiltered timeline that features all posts in a chronological order.

That is the kind of option that my bill would give the consumers on other types of social media platforms. Consumers will be able to choose whether to see an unfiltered social media feed or search results or whether to view the curated or personalized content that the site chooses for them. It would be an option. We believe this gives consumers more choice and more control. They would be able to easily switch back and forth between the two options whenever they wanted. After all, consumers may want to see the filter-driven content in some cases. I mean, I would certainly prefer to see Netflix recommendations that are tailored to my viewing history, and if you have 1,000 tweets to read, it can be useful to see the ones that you are most likely to be interested in at the top of that feed. But consumers should also have the option to escape from that filter bubble and to see information that has not been selected specifically for them.

I strongly support a light-touch approach to internet regulation that allows the free market to flourish. The internet would not have grown the way that it has had it been weighed down with heavy-handed government regulations. In order for free markets to work effectively, consumers need as much information as possible, including a better understanding of how internet platforms use artificial intelligence and complex filters to shape the information that those users see and receive.

My bill would provide transparency and consumer control without jeopardizing the opportunity and innovation that we have come to expect from the tech industry. As internet companies collect and make use of more and more of our personal information, it is important that consumers know how their data is being used. At an even more basic level, it is important for consumers to know that their data is being used to curate the content they see.

That is exactly what the Filter Bubble Transparency Act would do—allow

consumers online to know, one, that their information is being filtered and that they are seeing content that is being curated for them by that particular social media platform, and, two, give them an option to see unfiltered and uncurated content that would just come to them in normal chronological order.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to advance this legislation. I think it is an important first step in making sure that consumers know more about their information as it is being collected and how it is being used by internet companies. I will continue to work as we try to deal with this broader debate on data privacy, which is so important in the online world in which we live.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

LEGISLATION

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I return to the floor again this week to discuss Congress's progress on important legislation—or, rather, the lack of it—since the obsession with impeaching the President began.

When the House decided to proceed full steam ahead on impeachment, they promised that it wouldn't interfere with our ability to get other important work done for our constituents. While it has been less than a week since the House formally authorized their impeachment inquiry, the crusade to impeach the President and remove him started nearly 3 years ago.

For example, on January 20, which was actually Inauguration Day, 2017, at 12:19 p.m. the Washington Post ran the story with the headline "The Campaign to Impeach President Trump Has Begun." That was on Inauguration Day in 2017. Nineteen minutes into his Presidency, the writing wasn't only on the wall. It was on the front page of the Washington Post.

Our Democratic friends are on a kamikaze mission to get President Trump out of office less than a year before the next election, and, in the process, they are preventing Congress from solving the big problems facing the American people.

The latest casualty of this impeachment-at-all-costs strategy is a bill I introduced with my Democratic colleague from Connecticut, RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, called the Affordable Prescriptions for Patients Act. This legislation would lower the cost of Americans' prescription medication and save more than a half billion dollars in taxpayer money.

Here, in the Senate, it counts the Democratic whip, Senator DURBIN from Illinois, as well as the Assistant Demo-

cratic Leader, Senator MURRAY from Washington State, as cosponsors. With that kind of lineup, you would think this would be a no-brainer. Unfortunately, drug pricing legislation isn't the only consensus effort that has gotten caught up in impeachment mania.

For a quarter of a century, the Violence Against Women Act has provided resources to assist women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Unsurprisingly, this program has consistently maintained broad bipartisan support. There is agreement that we must do more to provide services and protection for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, but it is safe to say that there are disagreements on how best to accomplish that goal.

Those differences in opinion came to a head in February of this year. We were fresh off the heels of the longest government shutdown in history and working to fund the government through the remainder of the year, but our Democratic colleagues threw a curve ball when they insisted that we should not include a temporary extension of the Violence Against Women Act, which had expired in September of 2018.

Even amid the political jockeying we have been seeing in this Congress, this was a shocking omission. Republicans were in favor of a short-term reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act to provide time and space for bipartisan negotiations for a long-term reauthorization. Surprisingly, our Democratic colleagues in the House blocked this reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. So it expired.

Fortunately, though, our friends on the Appropriations Committee have continued to fully fund these programs, but the authorizing statute has expired because of this gamesmanship. Despite continued bipartisan negotiations led by the Senator from Iowa, Ms. ERNST, over the last 8 months, we haven't been able to come up with a consensus agreement to reauthorize the program on a long-term basis.

This has been an 8-month negotiation. This isn't all that complicated. We should be able to do it in the space of an afternoon, but, clearly, there is no desire to get this resolved.

Reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act is a top priority for Members on both sides of the aisle, and I hope we will work harder to make it happen rather than to use this important law to play partisan political games. Sadly, the Violence Against Women Act is not the only program to get caught up in the political crosshairs.

The Debbie Smith Act, another traditionally bipartisan bill here in the Senate, expired at the end of September because of the refusal of the House to take up the Senate-passed version and to send it to the President.

The Debbie Smith Act, you will recall, provides funding to State and

local crime labs to test DNA evidence and reduce the rape kit backlog. The Senate unanimously passed the bill in May to reauthorize this program, but the House simply refused to act. At a roundtable I held in Houston, a few months ago, I heard from rape victims and their advocates about how troubling and, frankly, how insulting all of this was.

After months, the House has now finally relented and voted to reauthorize the Debbie Smith Act, after the pressure on them became unbearable. I am glad they changed their minds, and I am hopeful we can get this bill to the President's desk soon. Although I would have welcomed less drama this time around, the Debbie Smith Act reauthorization will hopefully be an example of what Congress can accomplish when you put partisan political fights aside and work for our constituents; in other words, do the job we were elected to do when our constituents sent us here.

It is really disappointing that some of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle would rather relitigate the 2016 election—again, less than a year before the next election—rather than do the work of the American people. This obsession with impeachment mania has consumed our Democratic colleagues and is preventing us from getting work done on a nonpartisan basis. That is what our constituents want us to do.

Texas are worried about high prescription costs, worried about the state of our roads and bridges, and worried about our national security. In the case of the Democratic leader, I would be willing to wager that New Yorkers are worried about many of these issues too. So it is time to stop the partisan games. They don't result in pay raises for our troops, which have now been voted against two times by our Democratic colleagues. They don't advance victims' rights and give justice to survivors like the reauthorization of the Debbie Smith Act and the Violence Against Women Act would do. They don't increase the public's trust in our institutions of government and assure them that we really have their best interests at heart. Definitely, these games don't help make Americans' lives better.

We have heard our Democratic colleagues say ad nauseam that impeachment will not interfere with their ability to legislate, but the evidence suggests otherwise. What Americans want is action. What Americans want is for us to do our job. We can give them what they want by allowing legislation we know has a chance of becoming law, such as my drug pricing bill, the Debbie Smith Act, and the Violence Against Women Act, to come to the floor, get passed, and sent to the President. That would be doing our jobs, and I believe that is what our constituents want from each of us—not this single-minded obsession with impeachment that started the day the President was