

National Adoption Month is a good time to rededicate ourselves to caring for children in need and helping them find loving families to receive them.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me."

There are few actions more worthy of admiration than a decision to welcome a child in need and to create for that child a secure and loving home.

I am so grateful for all of the generous families across this country who have opened their hearts and found sons and daughters through adoption. I am also thankful for all of the birth mothers who have chosen adoption for their children to give them better lives in loving families.

I am honored to recognize the Adams family today for their embrace of their own adopted children, as well as everything they have done to make life better for children in Ethiopia.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, for the past few weeks, including this morning, the Republican leader has amazingly accused the Democrats of being uninterested in making progress for the American people because we are so distracted by the impeachment inquiry into President Trump. It is a ludicrous charge, not the least because Leader MCCONNELL has shuttered the Senate when it comes to legislative business.

The House has passed over 250 bills that Leader MCCONNELL has taken no action on here in the Senate. Leader MCCONNELL proudly called himself the Grim Reaper and blocked just about everything that came through the House long before impeachment was even being talked about. So this idea that impeachment is blocking us from doing things belies Senator MCCONNELL's record. Let me repeat it. The House has passed 250 bills, and Senator MCCONNELL has taken no action on them from January forward.

There are lots of these bills we could have put on the floor this week, but there has been not a one. The Republicans just block and block. They block legislation to protect Americans with preexisting conditions, to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, and even to secure our elections from foreign interference.

A few minutes ago, I heard Leader MCCONNELL say that everything was fine with the elections and that we don't need any more legislation. Go talk to the election officials around

the States. The States are the ones that have the say. The bottom line is they think we need to do more, and the experts think we need to do more. Only Leader MCCONNELL doesn't. Again, he is blocking that. If Russia interferes in 2020—and I hope it will not—all eyes will be on the Republican leader, who has repeatedly prevented us from moving forward on bipartisan legislation to make our elections safer.

To show another example of the legislative graveyard, in a few minutes, the two Senators from Connecticut—MURPHY and BLUMENTHAL—will be moving forward on bipartisan background checks, H.R. 8. It is overwhelmingly supported by the American people. Senator MURPHY and Senator BLUMENTHAL will ask for unanimous consent, and the Republicans will object. So, while the Republican leader accuses the Democrats of being too distracted to make progress, he has turned the Senate into a legislative graveyard, where we hardly ever vote on legislation, where we hardly ever have an open amendment process, where we hardly ever debate major issues. This is despite commitments that have been made by the Republican leader in the past. At one point, he said—and I am sure my colleagues from Connecticut will point this out—yes, we ought to do something on background checks. Yet nothing has happened—nothing.

You don't even have to ask me. My friend the Republican Senator from Pennsylvania, Mr. TOOMEY, said something last week that caught my attention. He and I may not agree on much, but here is what he said: "Our Democratic colleagues have frequently criticized the Republican leadership and Republican majority for not legislating. Sometimes they have a point." Those are his words, not mine.

I was here on the floor yesterday with the senior Senator from Texas, and we talked about how the Senate might go about trying to lower the costs of prescription drugs. I disagreed with the Senator's unanimous consent request, as it was too narrow a rifle shot. We need to do a whole lot more. Yet we agreed we could work through the issues if the Republican leader would only allow a debate on the floor whereby both sides could offer amendments and receive votes. We Democrats very much want to vote on legislation that would maintain protections for the people who have preexisting conditions. We Democrats very much want to have a vote on allowing Medicare to negotiate with the drug companies to dramatically lower drug prices. Let's have a debate on all of these. Who is stopping that? It is not the Democrats. It is the Republican leader.

The fact of the matter is, the kinds of open debates for which we wish and the American people wish have not happened in Leader MCCONNELL's legislative graveyard. The man who proudly called himself the Grim Reaper goes far too far in accusing the Democrats

of stifling progress. Instead, he should take a hard look in the mirror.

IMPEACHMENT

Madam President, in the House impeachment inquiry into President Trump, public hearings began yesterday with the testimony of George Kent and William Taylor.

Ambassador Taylor, who is a career public servant and a war hero who has long served Presidents of both parties, provided a startling new revelation—that his aide overheard a conversation between President Trump and Ambassador Sondland, during which the President made clear he cared more about Ukraine's investigating the Bidens than he did about helping Ukraine. The aide is reportedly set to appear before the House for a deposition later this week, and Mr. Sondland is set to appear before the Intelligence Committee for a public hearing next week.

All Senators will have an obligation to seek and review the full facts that will be developed by this inquiry to be able to render impartial justice. However, some of my Republican friends in the Senate have said they are not even paying attention to the hearings in the House. The distinguished chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary—a former House manager of an impeachment case, who, at the time, repeatedly urged Senators not to make up their minds before the case was in—recently said that he has made up his mind, that there is nothing there. This is before a single bit of evidence has been presented in the Senate. Alice in Wonderland: First is the verdict, then the trial. That is not becoming for the chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary.

While my Republican colleagues may not have been paying attention, I have been paying attention, and my Democratic colleagues in the Senate, who know they might have to act as judges and jurors in this case, are paying attention. America is also paying attention. The evidence we all heard from Mr. Taylor and Mr. Kent has cast a troubling portrait of a President who is trying to use the powers of his office for personal political gain. As the public hearings continue, we have a responsibility here in the Senate not to prejudge the case but to examine the evidence impartially. At the very least, Senators should be paying attention.

NOMINATION OF STEVEN J. MENASHI

Madam President, the Senate will vote today on the confirmation of Steven J. Menashi to serve on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals.

In all my time in this body, Mr. Menashi has been one of the most contemptible nominees to have come before the Senate. He would be a disgrace to the seat once held by the great Thurgood Marshall.

While sitting before the Committee on the Judiciary, Menashi refused to answer simple questions. He showed a breathtaking contempt for Senators on both sides of the aisle. His record on

race, women's equality, LGBTQ rights, and the rights of immigrants should be disqualifying. At the Department of Education, he helped to cook up an illegal scheme to use the Social Security data of students who had been swindled by for-profit colleges in order to deny them debt relief. A judge ruled this scheme violated Federal privacy laws.

At the very least, a candidate for a judgeship should show respect for the law. That is the lowest possible bar. A judge is supposed to revere the law, uphold it, and apply it with an even hand. How can anyone trust Mr. Menashi to come even close to doing that? Mr. Menashi is a textbook example of someone who does not deserve to sit on the Federal bench, particularly with a lifetime appointment.

My Republican colleagues, in my view, have rubberstamped too many of these extreme, unqualified nominees—nominees, in Mr. Menashi's case, who have been almost craven, but on few occasions, a small group has stood up and said: Enough. This is too far.

Well, my colleagues, if there were ever anyone who was too far, it is Menashi. There is no reason President Trump couldn't find a more suitable nominee for the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. I urge my Republican colleagues to do the right thing today and reject the Menashi nomination.

TAX RETURNS

On tax returns, yesterday a Federal appeals court ruled that Congress can seek 8 years of the President's tax returns. No doubt, the President will appeal the ruling to the Supreme Court in an effort to keep hidden what the President has been hiding for as long as he has been in public life—his tax returns.

Why the President has engaged in such an astounding breach of transparency is still unknown.

President Trump, what are you hiding?

The DC Circuit's decision—an 8-to-3 ruling—was clearly the correct legal result. It should be upheld.

FARMERS AND VETERANS

Last but not least, on farmers and veterans, President Trump has long fashioned himself a champion of everyday Americans—workers, farmers, veterans. This week has been a grim reminder that despite the President's promises, almost every week his administration undermines the very people he claims to champion.

Take our veterans whose service we commemorated earlier this week on Veterans Day. The Department of Veterans Affairs decided in 2017 to help Vietnam-era veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange by expanding the list of diseases that were eligible for health benefits to include bladder cancer, hypertension, Parkinson's-like symptoms, and hypothyroidism.

There are tens of thousands of veterans whose lives would be changed by this decision. It was the right decision based on research done by the VA. Unfortunately, it was recently revealed

that OMB Director and Acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney blocked funding for these new health benefits because of what it would cost. Think about that. Mick Mulvaney, who thought adding \$1.5 trillion to our deficit was an acceptable cost for tax cuts to the rich, believes the cost of health benefits for sick veterans is just too high. So wrong. So wrong. It is shameful that Mulvaney could actually be in the position he is.

The next time the President claims to be a champion for our Nation's veterans, the American people should remember what he is doing here—denying benefits to men and women who were in our Armed Forces, exposed to Agent Orange, and are now sick. It is too expensive to help them but not too expensive to give tax cuts to the wealthiest of Americans. Shame on the administration, shame on Mulvaney, and shame on President Trump.

What about our farmers? It is no secret that America's farmers have struggled as a result of President Trump's trade policies and retaliatory tariffs from other countries. The administration even created a new program through USDA to help offset the losses farmers were facing.

Well, now it turns out that the Trump administration has grossly mishandled that program. A report by the Democratic minority on the Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee, led by its ranking member, Senator STABENOW, revealed that the lion's share of Federal aid has gone to large agricultural conglomerates scattered across the South, not to small family farms in the Midwest who have suffered the most. Ninety-five percent of the largest per-acre payments have gone to Southern States, while the lowest payments have disproportionately gone to the farmers who are suffering in the Midwest. The administration lifted the limits on aid to row crops but kept the limits for other crops, meaning that more aid has gone into the pockets of the largest and wealthiest farms in America. The report even showed that tens of millions of dollars have gone to foreign-owned entities, including a beef factory in Brazil.

President Trump has claimed to look after our farmers, and he has claimed to look after our veterans, but he has instead turned his back on them. More and more Americans—farmers, veterans, others—are starting to notice.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). The Senator from Washington.

H.R. 8

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I want to thank Senators MURPHY and BLUMENTHAL for their tremendous leadership that we are here on the floor today to speak about.

I come today not just as a Member of the Senate representing my home State of Washington but as a former educator, as a mother, and as a grand-

mother devastated by how the gun violence epidemic is tearing apart our families and ravaging our communities in every State.

I am furious at Republican leaders who continue to stand by and do nothing while more and more lives are lost, just as I was after Newtown, Parkland, Sutherland Springs, and Marysville in my home State of Washington. I could go on.

We don't have to continue this cycle of violence, heartbreak, and inaction, and we are here today to emphasize that there is action we can take right now because earlier this year, the House passed H.R. 8—meaningful, bipartisan gun safety legislation—to address this terrible crisis through universal background checks and other popular reforms. But in the 260 days since H.R. 8 passed the House, it has languished here in the Senate despite repeated calls from myself and my Democratic colleagues for a vote.

That is why 58 days ago, following the tragic events at El Paso, Dayton, and Midland, I joined my Senate Democratic colleagues here on the floor to try to break the cycle and demand that we address the scourge of gun violence in this country by taking a vote here in the Senate on H.R. 8, which would install universal background checks—a policy that, by the way, is supported by an overwhelming majority of Americans.

In the face of Republican apathy, people across the country raised their voices even louder, demanding action to end the endless wave of gun tragedy, so much so that after this summer's string of horrors, President Trump bowed to public pressure and made a commitment to finally act to address the gun violence epidemic.

After months and years of inaction and far, far too many lives lost, it was the first sliver of hope in a long while—that the President and Senate Republicans would finally put the safety of our families over their allegiance to the NRA and do something substantive about ending this Nation's gun violence epidemic, working with Democrats toward commonsense reforms to end gun violence and keep people safe.

Now, more than 2 months later, President Trump has betrayed his pledge to address this tragic epidemic as if the past summer never even happened. Once again, he has chosen to abdicate his responsibility to keep our families and our communities safe and has broken yet another promise he made to the American people, kowtowing to the NRA and its unpopular, hard-right agenda to stymie commonsense gun reform as soon as mass shootings were out of the headlines.

Well, I can assure you, Senate Democrats and I are going to keep fighting for commonsense gun safety reforms, like universal background checks, even when gun violence isn't making a headline that day, because while President Trump continues carrying water for the NRA and Senate Republicans continue hiding behind President Trump,