

engaged in the daily fight against the terrorists.

My amendment would further condemn Iran for its hampering of diplomatic efforts and its destabilizing work throughout the region. It would call for greater consultation with the United States' allies and partners in the region, especially Israel, with regard to future stability we seek in a critical region, and it would reiterate the importance of the administration's consulting and coordinating with Congress on its long-term strategies for success in these struggles, including a thorough accounting of the risk of withdrawing too hastily.

I am glad that, after needless political delays, our Democratic colleagues finally allowed a first procedural vote on this legislation.

I am proud to support its provisions that concern Israel, Jordan, and Syria, and I will be proud to offer this amendment so the Senate can speak equally clearly on the fight against al-Qaida, ISIS, and other bad actors that needs to continue in both Syria and Afghanistan.

H.R. 1

Mr. President, on a totally different matter, this week Democrats in the House are beginning the committee process for a bill they are saying is their party's signature priority for this Congress—their signature priority. They are so focused on this legislation that they have given it the ceremonial designation of H.R. 1—their top priority.

I think it more accurately could be described another way: the “Democratic Politician Protection Act.” This sprawling proposal—sprawling, comprehensive proposal—is basically the far left’s entire Christmas wish list where our Nation’s political process is concerned.

What would it do? It would pile new Washington-focused regulations onto virtually every aspect of how politicians are elected and what Americans can say about them.

My Democratic friends have already tried to market this unprecedented intrusion with all the predictable clichés: “restoring democracy,” “for the people.”

Really? The only common motivation running through the whole proposal seems to be this: Democrats searching for ways to give Washington politicians more control over what Americans say about them and how they get elected. It is an attempt to rewrite the rules of American politics in order to benefit one side over the other.

I expect I will be talking about the “Democratic Politician Protection Act” here on the floor for a long time, but I wanted to just take a few minutes today to give my colleagues a quick tour—just a quick tour through a few of its components.

To begin with, Democrats want to make the Federal Elections Commission a partisan institution. Since Wa-

tergate, the FEC has been a six-member body. Neither party gets more than three seats—neither party. After all, the reason for that is this is a Commission with the sensitive duty of regulating Americans’ speech—Americans’ speech about politics and campaigns themselves.

The FEC should not be a weapon that one political party can wield against its rivals, but the legislation the Democrats are moving through committee would throw away—throw away—the bipartisan split. It would reduce the FEC to a five-member body and—listen to this—let sitting Presidents pick the majority—let sitting Presidents pick the majority. Obviously, this is a recipe for turning the FEC into a partisan weapon.

Democrats also empower the newly partisan FEC to regulate more of what Americans can say. That 3-to-2 FEC would get to determine what they subjectively see as “campaign related,” a new vague category of regulated speech.

There would also be new latitude to decide when a nonprofit’s speech has crossed that same fuzzy line and subsequently force the publication of the group’s private supporters.

All of this appears to be custom built to chill the exercise of the First Amendment and give Federal bureaucrats and the waiting leftwing mob a clearer idea of just whom to intimidate.

And this just scratches the surface of this proposal. The House Democrats are also eyeing an expensive new set of taxpayer subsidies for political campaign consultants. They want a new six-fold government match for certain types of political contributions—a new federally funded voucher program to line politicians’ pockets with even more taxpayer dollars, plus—listen to this. That wasn’t enough—taking our tax money to spend on attack ads and bumper strips and the like. Listen to this: 6 additional days of paid vacation for any Federal bureaucrat who decides they would like to hover around a polling place while Americans cast ballots.

So the new taxpayer subsidies don’t even pass the laugh test, but other aspects of the bill are even more disturbing. Perhaps most worrisome of all is the unprecedented proposal to federalize our elections, giving Washington politicians even more control over who gets to come here in the first place.

Hundreds—literally hundreds—of pages are dedicated to telling States how to run their elections, from when and where they must take place to the procedures they have to follow, to the machines they have to use.

Democrats want to import the inefficiencies of State and Federal bureaucracy to ballot boxes and voter rolls, while making it harder for States and localities to clean inaccurate data off the voter rolls, harder to remove duplicate registrations, ineligible voters, and errors, and harder to check every

box Washington Democrats demand before allowing you to pick your representatives.

Provision after provision would make it easier for campaign lawyers to take advantage of disorganization, chaos, and confusion. Yet the proposal does practically nothing to combat the real live voter fraud that does happen right before our eyes.

It is suspiciously silent on the murky “ballot harvesting” practices that recently threw North Carolina’s Ninth Congressional District into total chaos. There are pages and pages rewriting election law but nothing on this actual problem, perhaps because similar practices are perfectly legal in California—perfectly legal—where the Democratic Party made big gains in the House just last November.

So like I said, this has just been an introductory tour I am giving this morning—just an introductory tour. This sprawling power grab clocks in at 570 pages—570 pages. Seemingly every one of these pages is filled with some effort to rewrite the rules to favor the Democrats and their friends.

I have to say this: Our colleagues across the Capitol know what they are after. So I am going to continue to shed light on these far-left proposals many mornings. I want to make sure the American people understand what this is all about. I want to assure the American people, right from the outset, that my colleagues and I will fight to prevent this one-sided power grab. It may pass the House, but not the Senate.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRUZ). The Senator from Florida.

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

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

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:31 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. CAPITO).

STRENGTHENING AMERICA’S SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST ACT OF 2019—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will come to order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, at 3 o’clock p.m. today, all postcloture time on the motion to proceed to S. 1 expire and the

Senate proceed to a vote on the motion to proceed to S. 1.

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

Mr. MCCONNELL. For information of all of our colleagues, the vote will be at 3 o'clock.

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

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

RESOLUTION OF DISAPPROVAL ON RUSSIA SANCTIONS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, a vote earlier this month on the administration's decision to ease sanctions on a Russian oligarch puts the Senate on record on where its Members stand in terms of holding Russia accountable for its continued actions against the United States.

We need to be clear about what we are facing. Not only did Russia conduct what I believe to be a cyber act of war against the United States during the 2016 election cycle, it continues to do so with the President and his administration, apparently, indifferent.

Make no mistake. Russia tried to interfere in the recent midterm elections, and it continues to do so against our democratic allies in Europe. What has been the response of this body—the U.S. Senate—sworn to uphold the Constitution, to protect against enemies, foreign and domestic? Other than the belated passage of a Russia sanctions bill in the last Congress—a bill whose sanction provisions this administration has been slow or unwilling to enforce—we have done almost nothing.

Let's start in 2016 when top officials from the administration's national security and intelligence community came and warned congressional leadership of Russia's ongoing and serious attack on our election—this was during the election campaign—rightly asking for a bipartisan statement to tell Russian dictator Putin to stop.

What was Senate Majority Leader MCCONNELL's response to this request to protect our Nation?

No thanks; not going to do it.

History will no doubt look back with amazement at that decision.

What about the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—a historically celebrated body with jurisdiction over this Russian attack on the United States? It did not even conduct an investigation into Russia's actions in the last Congress. To date, I have heard no plans to do so in this Congress. That is incredible.

We have stunning reports—reports that normally would bring this city to a halt—of an FBI counterintelligence investigation opened on President Trump—whether the President called for the destruction of notes after meetings with Russian leaders . . . some-

thing unheard of in the history of that office . . . and that Trump has been asking about how the United States could possibly withdraw from the NATO alliance.

These are stunning developments, and they are not alone. For anyone paying attention, they shouldn't be surprised that our President is, in fact, pursuing policies the Russians could only dream of. They include the weakening of our democratic institutions; the weakening of our Western security alliance; the withdrawing of U.S. leadership on the global stage and ceding influence to Russia, Iran, and China; silence when Russia attacked Ukrainian naval ships; entertaining the idea of turning over an American ambassador to Russia for an absurd line of questioning; cozying up to global dictators and ignoring American values of democracy of human rights; and, of course, the President saying publicly and privately to Putin that he believes him instead of our intelligence experts when it comes to denying any attacks on democracy.

We also know that President Trump was incredibly suggesting such Russia-friendly policies during his campaign while at the same time pursuing business interests in that country.

I end with a question I have asked before on this floor. How can the party of Ronald Reagan continue to sit by while this President pursues policies aligned with a former KGB agent? Why are the first bills in this new Senate under Republican control not dealing with the serious threats to our Nation? Why isn't the Senate Foreign Relations Committee holding urgent hearings on these stunning developments between an American President and a Russian dictator, not to mention moving bipartisan legislation to protect U.S. membership in NATO?

Quite simply, with the government finally back open we need deal with these serious threats to our nation and democracy that we have heard involving our White House. When we are elected to office in Congress, we take an oath. In it, we swear to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. The President similarly swears to preserve, protect, and defend our Constitution. As such, it is time for all of us—Democrats and Republicans—to speak up and fulfill our constitutional responsibility.

FOR-PROFIT COLLEGES

Madam President, for anyone who thought the upheaval in the for-profit college industry was over or it was driven by an overzealous Obama administration determined to kill the industry, as some accused just a few short months ago, it is time to think again.

Just last month, amid the loving regulatory embrace of the for-profit college industry by President Trump's DeVos-led Department of Education, two major for-profit college chains have collapsed. It proves true the re-

cent warning by the Department of Education inspector general, Kathleen Tighe, that for-profit colleges represent a disproportionate risk to both students and American taxpayers.

The rot in the for-profit college industry runs much deeper than just the failures of Corinthian and ITT Tech. On December 17, for-profit college company Vatterott Colleges announced the immediate closure of its campuses nationwide, leaving 2,300 students stranded, including 200 at its campus in Fairview Heights, IL. The company had been in financial trouble for some time. It had already closed a number of campuses, including one in Quincy, IL.

The Department of Education must now provide Illinois and other Vatterott students with clear information about their options, including their eligibility to receive a closed school discharge of their Federal student loans and option to file a claim for a borrower defense discharge if they believe they were defrauded by the university.

In addition, the Department must make sure these students are not put at risk a second time by assuring that they have affordable, quality options to continue their education, such as community colleges. It would be adding insult to injury to allow these students to be lured by other predatory or financially shaky for-profit colleges, especially those facing State and Federal investigations.

Early in December, Education Corporation of America closed 75 campuses nationwide, affecting some 20,000 students. I am pleased, in this case, that the Department of Education developed a page on its website to inform ECA students about closed school discharges. It must do more to communicate with affected students and ensure they are able to continue their studies at quality, affordable institutions.

The vultures are already circling these students.

In a recent letter, Steve Gunderson, a former Member of the U.S. House of Representatives and lead lobbyist for the for-profit colleges and universities, announced that for-profit colleges are working to assist the students who were victims of these collapsed for-profit schools and that 20 for-profit colleges had already expressed interest in taking on these ECA students. It is simply double jeopardy to ask students, once defrauded by this industry, to be somehow rescued and lured into another contractual obligation by another school in the for-profit college industry.

Over the holiday season, around 30 campuses owned by Dream Center Education Holdings closed. They include the Argosy campus in Schaumburg, IL, and the Illinois Institute of Art—not to be confused with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, a reputable organization.

In August, I led several of my colleagues in writing to Secretary DeVos,

asking her to provide immediate assistance to these students who had borrowed money to go to these worthless schools. We were concerned that Dream Center was not providing students with information about closed school discharges and was pushing them into other bad options, like enrolling in another for-profit school. Among other things, we asked the Department to post an information page on its website to inform the students. Even weeks after the closure, we have yet to receive a response to this letter from the Department of Education.

Adding to the confusion for students in Illinois is the fact that for months Dream Center misrepresented that the Illinois Institute of Art campuses were accredited, even when its accreditor had made clear that was not the case. I have called on Secretary DeVos to investigate this misrepresentation, especially as it relates to these students' eligibility for borrower defense discharges. The National Student Loan Defense Network has filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of Illinois borrowers against the company for this misrepresentation, while the Department of Education and Washington remain silent.

Now, reports have surfaced of a new restructuring of these schools, with few details but major implications for students. The Department of Education must immediately inform students and the public about these changes.

Earlier this month, 48 State attorneys general, including our own Illinois attorney general, now retired, Lisa Madigan, and the District of Columbia reached a settlement with for-profit giant Career Education Corporation over consumer violations by the company. Under the settlement, Career Education Corporation agreed to forgo collecting \$493 million owed to it by 180,000 students nationally—\$48 million in relief for 17,000 students in Illinois who had been exploited by this for-profit school. I have long spoken out about these abuses and the misconduct of Career Education Corporation schools, especially their infamous and now defunct Le Cordon Bleu, Harrington College of Design, and Sanford-Brown brands. These fellows really dream up some wonderful names for worthless schools.

Just last week, for-profit college operator National American University Holdings announced “substantial doubt” that its finances would allow it to remain in business over the next year. The company, which has faced lawsuits related to deceptive practices, runs campuses in about a dozen States and online. Its closure would affect thousands of students.

How many more for-profit college collapses, closures, and State legal actions will it take before we get serious at the Federal level, both in Congress and at the Department of Education, about protecting students and taxpayers from this industry?

It just amazes me that so many people in this body stand back and watch

the so-called for-profit colleges and universities exploit students and their families, watch them run up debts they will never be able to pay back, wait until they default, and then threaten them with lawsuits and collection agencies, instead of realizing at the outset that these schools are not reputable. These students are lured with promises the schools can't keep, and they are also lured into debt they will never be able to repay. They will never end up with a job that allows them to pay back the debt.

Don't take my word for it; think of two simple numbers. Nine percent of all postsecondary students go to for-profit colleges and universities—9 percent. Thirty-four percent of all federal student loan defaults are students from for-profit colleges and universities. Nine percent of the students; 34 percent of the defaults. Why would that be happening? Well, because they overcharge the students, and they provide them with a worthless diploma if they stick it out and don't drop out.

These schools are a blight on higher education and an exploitation of innocent students and their families. Who are the ultimate losers when their debts are discharged? American taxpayers who subsidize these miserable, good-for-nothing schools and then watch as they are not repaying their debts because the students can't, and the taxpayers end up the losers again. If that is capitalism at work, save this country, because it is a terrible outcome for the students, for their families, and for American taxpayers.

I yield the floor.

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

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

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the time and start the vote now.

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

The question is on agreeing to the motion to proceed.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) and the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 76, nays 22, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 12 Leg.]

YEAS—76

Alexander	Fischer	Risch
Barrasso	Gardner	Roberts
Bennet	Graham	Romney
Blackburn	Grassley	Rosen
Blumenthal	Hassan	Rounds
Blunt	Hawley	Rubio
Boozman	Hoover	Sasse
Braun	Hyde-Smith	Schumer
Burr	Inhofe	Scott (FL)
Cantwell	Isakson	Scott (SC)
Capito	Johnson	Shelby
Cardin	Jones	Sinema
Casey	Kennedy	Smith
Cassidy	King	Stabenow
Collins	Klobuchar	Sullivan
Coons	Lankford	Tester
Cornyn	Lee	Thune
Cortez Masto	Manchin	Tillis
Cotton	Markey	Toomey
Cramer	McConnell	Warner
Crapo	McSally	Whitehouse
Cruz	Menendez	Wicker
Daines	Murkowski	Wyden
Duckworth	Murray	Young
Enzi	Perdue	
Ernst	Portman	

NAYS—22

Baldwin	Heinrich	Sanders
Booker	Hirono	Schatz
Brown	Kaine	Shaheen
Carper	Leahy	Udall
Durbin	Merkley	Van Hollen
Feinstein	Murphy	Warren
Gillibrand	Peters	
Harris	Reed	

NOT VOTING—2

Moran	Paul
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The motion is agreed to.

STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST ACT OF 2019

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill.

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1) to make improvements to certain defense and security assistance provisions and to authorize the appropriation of funds to Israel, to reauthorize the United States-Jordan Defense Cooperation Act of 2015, and to halt the wholesale slaughter of the Syrian people, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

AMENDMENT NO. 65

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I call up my amendment No. 65.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment.

The senior assistant bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. MCCONNELL] proposes an amendment numbered 65.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the reading be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To express the sense of the Senate that the United States faces continuing threats from terrorist groups operating in Syria and Afghanistan and that the precipitous withdrawal of United States forces from either country could put at risk hard-won gains and United States national security)

At the appropriate place, insert the following: