

personally identifiable information, and whistleblower information. Information also shows that she played a key role in the Veterans' Administration obstruction of my investigation of VA corruption.

My Democratic colleagues rushed Ms. Bradsher's nomination through the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee without even investigating the allegations that I brought to the committee's attention. Let's start with one of these: the VA Integrated Enterprise Workflow Solution, otherwise known by the acronym VIEWS. Records show that this system exposes sensitive medical, health, and personal information of many veterans, as well as whistleblower names and information. At least 1,900 Veterans Affairs employees have access to this system but without the need to view this sensitive information.

Now, Ms. Bradsher has direct responsibility for that system as the VA's Chief of Staff, her present position. Emails and screenshots from VIEWS were supplied to me by whistleblowers. And most of my colleagues know I get a lot of information from whistleblowers. These emails show that these whistleblowers notified Ms. Bradsher's deputy last July—a whole year ago—about these issues. One of these whistleblowers told Ms. Bradsher's office she had been harassed and that she feared for her safety.

To this day, Ms. Bradsher hasn't followed up or instructed anyone else to follow up with these whistleblowers to make sure that their concerns were addressed. Despite questions for the record asked by Ranking Member MORAN and Senator BLACKBURN, Ms. Bradsher has offered no explanation whatsoever for why the specific personnel information brought to her office's attention was not secured as it should be secured. Instead, she pointed to a few feeble actions she says were taken to address future correspondence, such as training on private data.

This is unacceptable for a nominee who will be in charge of the VA's effort to modernize our veterans' sensitive electronic health records if she is confirmed. Ms. Bradsher was in the Chief of Staff position 16 months before whistleblowers notified her of the serious potential data breach and now for a year after. That kind of inaction and negligence is remarkable, even for the Veterans' Administration.

These flaws provide a back door enabling whistleblower retaliation and potential identity fraud, and they must be fixed now, not ignored. The matter was serious enough that the Office of Special Counsel last August found "substantial likelihood of wrongdoing" in potential violation of Federal privacy laws and ordered the Secretary to complete an investigation within 60 days. The Veterans' Administration still hasn't completed its investigation.

The Office of Special Counsel advised my office that the most serious allegation relating to data privacy has al-

ready been confirmed. The Veterans' Administration report to the Office of Special Counsel should be issued by August 1, just days away.

We would fail our Nation's veterans and neglect our constitutional duty to offer informed advice and consent on this nomination if we allowed the nomination to go forward before we have those answers. Also, how can any Member have an informed choice on this nominee if the Veterans' Affairs Committee didn't even bother to interview the people with relevant information on that matter?

Instead, rather than investigate, the majority actually circulated a misleading memo to the committee members that was written by the Veterans' Administration. It also slandered my office by claiming my staff had these allegations but intentionally hid them from the committee until the day before Ms. Bradsher's hearing.

This is not true. My staff provided the information to the committee right away. The VA ought to quickly get with the program.

That brings me to my second point of opposition to this nominee. Documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show that Ms. Bradsher played a key role in the VA's failed response to my investigation into VA corruption, which the VA has stonewalled for over 2 years.

We shouldn't continue to reward the Veterans' Administration and a nominee for their inattention to congressional oversight. We shouldn't confirm a nominee who represents business as usual and continued inattention to Congress and our veterans. I urge my colleagues to vote against this nomination until we get the answers to the American people, as they deserve those answers.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. DUCKWORTH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, I appreciate the opportunity to address the Senate today as Vermont's new Senator, and I hope to express how I will serve Vermont and our country, and I will outline the challenges we face as a governing body and as a nation.

Most importantly, I will state why I believe that the U.S. Senate can be an institution that renews the strength and vitality of the democracy that all of us—whomever we represent and whatever views we advocate—depend on for our mutual benefit.

But before I begin, I would like to say that my heart, today, is with the people of Vermont. They are grappling with the brutal flooding that hit us

last week. And when I came to the floor last week after touring the damage in Vermont, I pledged that, along with Senator SANDERS and Congresswoman BALINT, we will do everything in our power to get the people of Vermont the resources that they need to build back from this. And I make that pledge again today, and I appreciate the leadership of our senior Senator, Senator SANDERS, in advocating for Vermont as we recover from this real crisis.

I also appreciate the offers of help from so many of my colleagues here in the Senate. One of the first Members who approached me was Senator KENNEDY from Louisiana, a State that has had to deal with more than its share of natural calamities.

Vermonters, Madam President, have always supported emergency aid when disaster struck others. Senator SANDERS and I are very grateful for so many assurances of support now that Vermonters face their own huge recovery challenge.

I recently heard our colleague, Senator ERIC SCHMITT, from Missouri, give his first speech. He spoke with real respect and reverence for the people of Missouri—hardworking, honest, family- and community-oriented, and very generous. And I felt Senator SCHMITT's deep connection to the people who sent him here. In that respect, Senator SCHMITT spoke for me. In fact, he spoke for all of us. And Senator SCHMITT and I—and all of us—share something else: The citizens that we represent, despite many differences on many issues, share common needs; all the things that families and communities need—affordable housing, safe schools, good healthcare, a secure environment for our kids, and good jobs where you can pay your monthly bills and have a little left at the end of the month. We share that in common.

So the question I have is this: If we share so much respect for the citizens who sent us here in our commitment to their shared aspiration, why can't we make more progress? Why are we so divided?

I believe there are two reasons: First, our democracy is more imperiled at this time than at any time since our Civil War; and, second, working middle-class Americans have been treading water economically for the past 40 years. Top-down economic policies having failed them. So the towns many of us grew up in with diverse economies and vibrant downtowns, farms, and factories that support our communities are vanishing. And many Americans, no matter how hard they work, still struggle to pay their bills.

Our challenge is strengthening our democracy and improving the living standards for everyday Americans. And we must do both, or we won't do either. Democracy depends on trust. It also depends on results.

If conditions stagnate for working Americans and they fall further behind, their trust in democracy will

begin to erode. And we need democracy to ensure that working families have a seat at the table when their aspirations are at stake.

As a young person, I was the beneficiary of the fruits of democracy. I grew up in the 1960s, one of six kids in an Irish-Catholic family in Springfield, MA. It was stable and secure.

When I was asked where I was from, I answered by giving the name of my Catholic parish, Holy Name, not the city of my birth. The sense of community was paramount. Helping a neighbor is what you did, reflectively and always.

When I was a boy, my mother did something that only later did I realize what profound impact it had on me. She taught me what small “d” democracy meant in practice. When I was in grammar school, I didn’t know what abortion was. I did know my parents were churchgoing Catholics who were against it. It was also illegal in Massachusetts at that time. And a neighbor across the street actually went to jail for performing abortions. My mother made dinner every night for our family of eight. And every week, she sent me across the street with another hot dinner for our neighbors while their parent was away for a while.

When I think about what my mother did, I really hope I can follow her example. Instead of vilifying a neighbor with whom she disagreed on something that was really important to her, she made that family dinner and helped a neighbor and their family through a very difficult time.

Wouldn’t democracy be stronger, wouldn’t our communities be stronger, if we made dinner or gave a ride to the post office or helped out with childcare for someone who needed a hand, even if we disagreed with them?

Later, I attended Holy Cross College in Worcester, MA, like my father and my three brothers. In those college years, two great issues captured my attention: the word “Vietnam” and civil rights. And as I was finishing up my second year at Holy Cross, I learned of a community organizing project in the Lawndale neighborhood of the West Side of Chicago. It was led by a Jesuit seminarian that was affiliated with Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, Southern Christian Leadership Conference. I was really interested. And I hitchhiked 900 miles from Springfield, MA, to Chicago, IL. It really changed my life.

Lawndale was poor, ignored by city hall. We students went door-to-door asking about concerns. And when the lack of sanitation services emerged as an issue, we got together with neighborhood folks and we trucked trash from Lawndale to city hall. If they say you wouldn’t pick up the trash in Lawndale, we would bring it to city hall. It caught the mayor’s attention.

The next week there was a caravan of Chicago sanitation trucks throughout Lawndale. It worked. But our fight didn’t stop at trash pickups. Just before I was to return to Holy Cross for

my junior year, we discovered that unscrupulous folks in real estate were brutally exploiting Black families who were moving into Lawndale through a practice what we now know as redline. And they were doing it with the active help of the Federal Housing Authority and with the downtown big banks. I was really shocked at the injustice. And what was most shocking to me then, as an idealistic and eager young person who was accustomed to being treated fairly, was that this immense infliction of suffering on those families was legal. It was legal for banks and the FHA to deny mortgages on the basis of the color of that person’s skin.

So I had to make a decision at that point. It was time for me to return to Holy Cross for my junior year. But that would come with a cost: abandoning the neighborhood folks whose hopes we had helped raise that they could get relief from these oppressive contracts. But that felt wrong. Or I could drop out of Holy Cross and continue my community organizing work. That came with a risk then: losing my student deferment and being drafted—as many of my classmates from high school had been—to go to Vietnam, a war that so many of us opposed. But it felt right to stay and continue my work. And I stayed in Chicago.

During that next year, we created a successful neighborhood-led organization called a Contract Buyers League. We exposed the rip-off contracts, demonstrated in front of the big downtown banks, the Federal Housing Authority. We picketed in the serene North Shore neighborhoods of the contract sellers, exposing what they had done in exposure that was long overdue. In short, we really raised hell—or as John Lewis would say, “good trouble.”

But we succeeded in getting then-Mayor Daley to help us renegotiate these contracts and substitute them with legitimate mortgages that folks should have had in the first place. It made a big difference in the lives of many residents of Lawndale. And it certainly made a difference in my life.

I saw the power of a community coming together. And I saw how democracy was effective when people cooperate when they did work together. And in seeing how much of that injustice was actually illegal is when I made a lifelong commitment to two things: the law—if I became a lawyer I could use the legal system to help people hurt by bad laws; and politics—if I ran for the legislature, I could work to change laws to address injustice and create opportunity and strengthen communities.

In my years of service as a community organizer in Chicago, as a State senator in Vermont, as a Member of the House of Representatives, has taught me that democracy is more—it is more than an ideal we strive for. It is the tool that we use to make meaningful differences in the lives of people we love and in the lives of people we may never meet.

We must preserve our democracy so that hard-working Americans can fi-

nally gain economic security—the ability to pay those bills and have a little left over and the ability to build stable communities. And, hopefully, these communities can grow and thrive so that, one day, if their kids decide to stay or they leave and return, they can do so with a decent job and promising opportunities.

And as U.S. Senators, each of us has a unique and urgent opportunity to revitalize our democracy and improve prospects for our constituents.

Let me acknowledge candidly, we have, within this body and within this country, very substantial differences on many ideological issues. But we also have many areas of agreement. You know, the folks in KATIE BRITT’s Alabama, in JOHN FETTERMAN’s Pennsylvania, and the folks in my State of Vermont, they need and deserve the same things: affordable childcare so parents can work; they need affordable homes and apartments; they need the security that when they drop their child off at the bus stop or at school, that child is going to return home safely.

These are the building blocks of a strong community. These are among the issues that the U.S. Senate should debate. You know, it is said that the U.S. Senate is the greatest deliberative body. That is something we know that is very much now in dispute. But we do have the power to make it so. And in doing so, we can help restore democracy. We can debate those issues and others on the Senate floor.

You know, should social media companies enjoy legal immunity for anything their algorithms promote? Should we work for a sustainable budget but talk about spending and revenues? Is it acceptable that we have the most expensive healthcare system in the world that leaves so many people behind? How do we act immediately and effectively to stop climate change from burning up the planet?

The Senate can deliver, and it can and should debate. But deliberation should be in service of making a good decision. It should be in service of achieving an outcome. It should not be a device by which delay is endless and resolution nonexistent.

Every Senator I know is genuinely honored to be serving in this body. Every Senator takes her and his responsibility very seriously. But every Senator I know realizes that the honor of service is hollow unless we get good things done. That is our job.

And as a Senator, I will use the valuable lessons of democracy I have learned: from my parents, the importance of helping a neighbor you may disagree with; from my time in Chicago, the power of democracy in action; and from Vermont, struggling today with the onslaught of the flood, the strength of community that shows us, that even on the toughest of days, the ability to achieve when we work together.

We in this country and in this Senate may face significant challenges. We

have opportunities to succeed if we face those challenges together.

(Applause, Senators rising.)  
I yield the floor.

NOMINATION OF RACHEL BLOOMEKATZ

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, today, the Senate will vote to confirm Rachel Bloomekatz to an Ohio seat on the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Ms. Bloomekatz is a longtime appellate litigator who has represented a diverse range of clients, across the political and ideological spectrum, throughout her career. She received her bachelor's degree from Harvard College and her law degree from the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law, before clerking for Judge Guido Calabresi on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

Following this role, Ms. Bloomekatz clerked for Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court and spent 1 year serving as an assistant attorney general in the Massachusetts Attorney General's office. She then clerked for Justice Breyer on the U.S. Supreme Court.

She later entered private practice, where she focused on protecting voting rights and holding government actors accountable. During this time, she represented a wide variety of clients on appellate matters, including, in one case, representing one of our Republican colleagues in the Senate.

Today, Ms. Bloomekatz works as a solo practitioner. And throughout her legal career, she has amassed significant experience briefing and arguing dozens of Federal and State appeals. In each matter, irrespective of her client, she has proven herself to be an effective advocate and has regularly won praise from opposing counsel.

The American Bar Association has unanimously rated Ms. Bloomekatz "well qualified," and she has the strong support of Senator BROWN.

I urge my colleagues to join me in voting for her confirmation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, it is my honor today to rise in support of Rachel Bloomekatz to serve as a judge on the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. People often think of the courts, especially the circuit courts—this comes from a nonlawyer, keep in mind—as something like an ivory tower, detached from everyday people's lives.

We know the decisions judges make affect Ohio's workplaces and affect Ohioans in their paychecks and in their own personal freedom about how to live their lives. That is why it matters so much whom we promote to these important jobs.

We want our brightest talent. We need our brightest talent on the bench. We need thoughtful judges—thoughtful judges who adhere to the highest ethical standards, who follow the letter and the spirit of the law. We need judges who are compassionate, capable

of recognizing and understanding the many different perspectives of the people who will come into their courtrooms. And we need judges with wisdom and with a love for our country's core values.

Rachel Bloomekatz will be all of those things. She will protect the rights of all Americans, not just the powerful and the privileged—something, unfortunately, we see far too much of in the Nation's highest courts.

Ms. Bloomekatz brings with her not only impressive legal credentials but the empathy, the intellect, and the deep commitment to justice required to serve the people of the Sixth Circuit.

Rachel had an impressive academic career, to be sure. She clerked for highly respected judges on the State supreme court, in the Federal district, and in circuit levels, and she clerked on the U.S. Supreme Court. Rachel has a robust and successful litigation practice where she has advanced the cause of justice.

Throughout her career, Ms. Bloomekatz sat on both sides of the table. She represented people across the ideological spectrum. She has represented companies and consumers. She has argued on behalf of the government and for the rights of private citizens.

She has been recognized for the breadth of her practice, which includes work on both civil and criminal matters, both types of cases she will see as a judge on the Sixth Circuit.

She has worked with women's groups, and she has worked with veterans groups, seeking justice for women harmed while giving birth on Active Duty at military hospitals. She helped to represent our colleague Senator MARCO RUBIO with an amicus brief, arguing in support of his legislation providing protections for victims of human trafficking.

Don't just take it from me. Listen to the chorus of people from all across the ideological and political spectrum who enthusiastically support Rachel Bloomekatz's nomination. Twenty fellow Supreme Court clerks, including several Scalia clerks and Kavanaugh clerks, wrote to the Judiciary Committee saying:

We hold diverse opinions on many areas of law. We are united in our view, though, that Rachel is an extraordinary nominee who will uphold the best traditions and defining attributes of the Federal courts, the rule of law, equal justice, fidelity, and the Constitution.

They are joined by 25 Ohio appellate lawyers—again, from across the political and ideological spectrum—who also wrote in support. They said:

Some of us will no doubt disagree with some of the opinions Rachel will author or join on in the Sixth Circuit. We are united, though, in urging the Judiciary Committee and the United States Senate to confirm her to the Sixth Circuit.

The letter goes on:

Rachel has the right temperament to serve as an Article III judge, and her intelligence, diligence, and respect for the rule of law will

make her an excellent addition to the Sixth Circuit.

Perhaps Ms. Bloomekatz's most powerful endorsement is from the judges already on the Sixth Circuit who have appointed her to represent clients in serious cases with fundamental rights at stake.

Ms. Bloomekatz is supported by Jewish leaders who represent the breadth and diversity of Ohio's Jewish community—Eric Fingerhut, former Member of the House, the president and CEO of Jewish Federations of North America; Howie Beigelman, the executive director of Ohio Jewish Communities, who recently brought a group of his colleagues to Washington, last week, to talk to Members of the Ohio delegation in both parties about the evil scourge of anti-Semitism.

Rabbi Kanter, Rachel's rabbi when she was a child in Nashville, said:

Rachel's deep values, informed by her Biblical faith, have led to her compassion for people and her commitment to justice and to the law. I can think of no better endorsement than that. I can think of no better candidate to serve the States of the Sixth Circuit—my State of Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan, and Tennessee. There is no better candidate than Rachel Bloomekatz.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting Rachel Bloomekatz's confirmation.

VOTE ON BLOOMEKATZ NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Bloomekatz nomination?

Mr. BROWN. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. MULLIN) and the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT).

The result was announced—yeas 50, nays 48, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 187 Ex.]

YEAS—50

Baldwin	Heinrich	Rosen
Bennet	Hickenlooper	Sanders
Blumenthal	Hirono	Schatz
Booker	Kaine	Schumer
Brown	Kelly	Shaheen
Cantwell	King	Sinema
Cardin	Klobuchar	Smith
Carper	Lujan	Stabenow
Casey	Markey	Tester
Coons	Menendez	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Murphy	Warnock
Durbin	Murray	Warren
Feinstein	Ossoff	Welch
Fetterman	Padilla	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Peters	Wyden
Hassan	Reed	

NAYS—48

Barrasso	Budd	Cotton
Blackburn	Capito	Cramer
Boozman	Cassidy	Crapo
Braun	Collins	Cruz
Britt	Cornyn	Daines