

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR OBJECTION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I am objecting to consideration of the nomination of Brodi Fontenot to be Chief Financial Officer of the Treasury Department.

In May 2014, I found out about questionable hiring practices at the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, known as FinCEN. The problem occurred after the agency posted job requirements for openings in the enforcement division. Eligible candidates were disqualified for a criterion that was never in the original job posting: a law degree. This is illegal under Federal hiring guidelines.

In the process, FinCEN rejected qualified veterans who applied for the positions. Instead, FinCEN hired three former Federal prosecutors for the positions. Veterans preference doesn't guarantee veterans a job, but it does give them extra consideration for jobs for which they are qualified. The unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans is significantly higher than the rate for the general population. These men and women are extremely capable. They have an array of job skills to offer in the workplace. It is inexcusable for FinCEN or any other Federal agency to reject qualified veterans who faithfully served our country. Our veterans deserve better from the Obama administration.

As part of my investigation, I requested all emails sent between the Treasury Department and FinCEN pertaining to this issue. To date, I have received a total of four emails. The Treasury Department has tried to convince me that no other relevant emails exist, but I am still not convinced. Their search was limited to only the 8 months when the vacancy announcements were open. This excluded any email communications that took place in preparation for posting the announcements or during 2014 when problems with the announcements were found.

As a result, I placed a hold on the former Assistant Secretary for Management at the Treasury Department who was nominated to be Deputy Secretary at HUD. Instead of simply providing the requested documents so that I could release the hold, former Majority Leader REID ignored what was done to veterans and pushed through the nomination over my objections.

In January 2015, I requested any emails sent between FinCEN and main Treasury using alternate email and handheld devices, as well as any email messages that were printed and saved by FinCEN but no longer retained in the electronic email system. The response from the Treasury Department outlined the Federal Government's records retention regulations but did not include any of the requested documents.

This is unacceptable. Therefore, I am objecting to consideration of Mr. Fontenot's nomination.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I was unable to cast a vote on the nomination of Dr. Dava Newman to be the Deputy Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. I missed the vote yesterday because I was meeting with turkey growers in Minnesota who are struggling with the avian influenza outbreak, and I attended the funeral services for my long-time friend, colleague and mentor, John Mooty. My vote would not have changed the outcome and had I been present I would have voted in support of Dr. Newman's nomination.

The work being done at NASA pushes the boundaries of innovation, science, and exploration, and it is critical we have strong leaders like Dr. Newman in place to lead those initiatives. Dr. Newman is well known for her cutting-edge work in developing the next generation of space suits. As a professor of aeronautics and astronautics and engineering systems at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dr. Newman will bring a strong academic, research, and technical background to this position. As a member of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, I supported Dr. Newman's nomination when it was considered by the committee earlier this year. I am pleased that Dr. Newman was confirmed by the Senate to be the Deputy Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

STEVE GLEASON ACT

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I support the Steve Gleason Act, which passed the Senate last week. I would especially like to thank Senator VITTER for championing this important legislation that will ensure patients on Medicare have access to critical speech-generating devices.

I am so glad that we were able to come together to pass this bipartisan bill and take an important step toward giving patients their voices back.

For Americans affected by debilitating diseases, speech-generating devices aren't a luxury—they are a lifeline. Without these devices, many people who are suffering from diseases like ALS and Parkinson's can't communicate with their family members, caregivers and friends. Many patients use their devices in conjunction with eye gaze technology because they no longer have use of their hands, arms, and other parts of their body. And these new technologies allow patients to use the Internet and email—technologies most of us take for granted but are crucial to help keep patients connected with their communities.

Unfortunately, recent policy changes have threatened patients' access to these important devices and associated technologies.

Under the new policy, Medicare will stop paying for speech-generating devices if a patient is admitted to a hos-

pital, nursing facility, or hospice. It is at this time that patients are most vulnerable and most in need of being able to communicate with their doctors, caregivers, and loved ones.

I have heard heartbreaking stories of patients who have lost their ability to communicate when they enter a care facility. One person told of having to put her mother in hospice care. When her mother entered hospice, Medicare would no longer cover her mother's device. The daughter was devastated that she could no longer understand what her mother was saying. She could tell how frustrated her mother was by this new isolation, but she was helpless to do anything about it.

I have also heard from people who have decided to forego treatment in hospice or a nursing home because they would rather suffer at home than lose their voice. This is simply unacceptable.

That is why I have worked with Senator VITTER to restore full access to speech-generating devices for those who need them.

The Steve Gleason Act will ensure that patients have continuous access to their speech-generating devices, no matter where they are receiving treatment. And the bill will allow patients to use eye-tracking technology with their devices—technology that is vital for patients who can no longer use their arms or hands.

Ultimately, these changes will ensure that Americans who have been robbed of their ability to speak by diseases like ALS aren't also robbed of relationships with their caregivers and loved ones.

Again, I thank my colleagues in the Senate for passing this important bill and I urge the House to pass this legislation and give patients their voices back.

REMEMBERING SHAWN PHILLIP SOMITS

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, today I honor the life and service of Shawn Phillip Somits of Muncy, PA, a Federal corrections officer at USP Allenwood and a U.S. Army veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, whose life tragically ended on April 2, 2015.

Shawn Somits was born on July 1, 1975, in Williamsport, PA, the son of John and Charlotte Somits, of Muncy. Shawn was a 1994 graduate of Muncy High School and attended both Penn College and Bucknell University. In 2003, Shawn married his wife, Daisy, and welcomed the birth of his first child, Faith. At this time, Shawn was dutifully serving his country in OIF/OEF in the U.S. Army, where he was deployed to both Iraq and Kuwait from February 2003 until April of 2004. Upon his return from deployment in 2004, Shawn entered into Federal service with the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Prisons as a corrections officer at USP Allenwood,