narcotics—the revenue from these destroying drugs we have—and if the doctors don't understand it, here is the problem, as I have just said. We have top-notch pharmaceutical manufacturing companies doing many good things for us and improving our lives by producing a product, and we have, basically, the Federal Government—the DEA and the FDA—approving it and allowing it to get into the market. Then, we have the doctors, the most trusted people next to our family, saying: Take it; it will help you; it will be good for you. Then, we have a full-flown epidemic.

We are fighting Zika now. We have Ebola and all these other things. We are concerned about epidemics, and here we already have one that is full-blown and matured, and we are not doing anything. So I am hoping that common sense will prevail.

We found a pay-for—a lifeboat, basically. It is one penny. Opponents are saying it is going to be passed onto the consumer. Well, it can't be. The CDC basically controls the pricing. So they can't gouge the people. Trust me, it is as profitable as anything they make in the pharmaceutical arena. One penny on a milligram is not going to bankrupt anybody, and it is not going to keep any product off the market that is needed. Tell me how else we are going to get $1.5 billion to $2 billion every year to help people get off of this horrible epidemic.

I thank the Senator for helping.

I want to continue reading a letter from one of our constituents. My colleague gets them the same as I get them, and we talk about this all the time. I want to thank her for helping me fight this because together we are going to make a difference.

The letter goes like this:

> I reach out to you in hopes of possibly making a future I've worked really hard for a little brighter. My name is Kayla, and I am a recovering addict. My sobriety date is February 13, 2013. I struggle with addiction to pain medication of all sorts. It started out as drinking and smoking when I was 13. That's basically all I ever did until I turned 17 and tried my first pill.
>
> It blew me completely out of control from there. While in active addiction, I got in trouble with law enforcement for stealing and received a charge for grand larceny. This is when I was only 20, and that was the first and last time I've been in trouble with the law.

This was a nonviolent crime, basically, for stealing.

Continuing with her letter:

> I've changed so much since the day I took the first pill. I completed rehabilitation at Crossroads Recovery Home in Gilbert, West Virginia, along with my dear friend Jessica Grubb who sadly lost her battle to this horrible disease.

My colleague and I have sponsored ''Jessie's Law,'' and so we know about this tragedy.

Continuing with the letter:

> It truly saved my life. When I completed treatment, I came home to start Drug Court in Greenbrier County, West Virginia. I completed that without any sanctions the whole course of the year I was in the program.
>
> I recently moved to Washington State with my husband and children. I want more than anything to take my recovery and life a step further by starting college. Ever since I was a little girl my dream has been to become a veterinarian. That has never changed in my almost 26 years of life. Due to my felony, that dream more than likely can't come true. I would not be able to hold a license unless otherwise approved by the Board of Veterinary Medicine. It's not likely they would approve me.
>
> I have worked so hard to be where I'm at today. My dream is to apply to Ohio State University in August of 2016 for the spring 2017 semester. I know I can be a vet. I want to prove to addicts everywhere that there is light at the end of that tunnel. The pain can be stopped. You can go from having to have a fix to get out of bed to having a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine.
>
> I want to show everyone that this small town West Virginia opioid addict made it, and not only that she make it, but that she pushed the limits and reached the stars. The rumor is true. We do recover.

Now, let me tell my colleagues the rest of the story. Right now, unless we change the laws, unless we change our attitudes about how we treat addiction and look at it as an illness that needs to have treatment—unless we can do that and find the treatment—we will have people like this person, who got sober—she has been sober for over 6 years—and turned her life around and wants to be a doctor of veterinary medicine, which she doesn't think she can do now because she ruined her life at a very young age and for which she is now paying the consequences. But it was a nonviolent crime. It was a nonviolent crime.

What we have said, and what we are trying to forge into a piece of legislation, is that if you have a felony on your record from a drug addiction and it was not violent—you didn't do it with a violent crime of guns and weapons and harming people, it wasn't a horrible sexual crime, and none of those things happened; all you did was steal, which is a crime, and you have a felony on your record—and if you go through drug rehabilitation, if you become a mentor for at least another year—so that is a 2-year recovery—you then qualify to go before a review panel, which will probably be made up of your sentencing judge, the arresting officers, and the addiction treatment center personnel, who can say you deserve to have one chance in life to clear your record, to expunge your record and now to be a productive citizen, to be a doctor of veterinary medicine, or to be able to be anything you want.

Yes, you did screw up. You made a heck of a mistake. But now we are going to give you that second chance because you have fought forward and become clean. You are sober, and you are helping other people become clean and sober. If not, we are going to throw a whole generation of absolutely productive Americans out.

What I am asking for is consideration on both sides of the aisle, Democrats and Republicans. Forget about being Democrats and Republicans, and let's be Americans. Let's reach out and help people who want to be productive Americans and who want to contribute to society.

These are the things we have to do that are common sense. I am hoping all of us will come together, and I know we will.

(Mr. PERDUE assumed the Chair.)

Mr. President, I thank the Chair for allowing me to speak on this subject. I do it every week. I am going to continue to do it until we make changes. This affects your beautiful State of Georgia the same as it affects West Virginia. This is one thing we all agree on. We must end this opioid drug addiction, this drug-infested addiction this country has. We are the most drug-infested Nation on Earth.

When you consider that 80 percent—80 percent—of all the opioids in the world that are produced are consumed in a country that has less than 5 percent of the world's population—in the United States of America—something is wrong. We are better than this. We are better than this.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 2578, which the clerk will report.

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

> A bill (H.R. 2578) making appropriations for the Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.
>
> Pending:
>
> Shelby/Mikulski amendment No. 4685, in the nature of a substitute.
>
> McConnell (for McCain) amendment No. 4787 (to amendment No. 4685), to amend section 2709 of title 18, United States Code, to clarify that the Government may obtain a specified set of electronic communication transactional records under that section, and to make permanent the authority for individual terrorists to be treated as agents of foreign powers under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978.
>
> McConnell motion to recommit the bill to the Committee on Appropriations for a period of 14 days.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

DACA, DAPA, AND FILLING THE SUPREME COURT VACANCY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, 15 years ago I introduced a bill called the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act was designed to give children brought to the United States by their parents, who were undocumented, a chance—a path toward legalization, a path toward citizenship. These were people, now in their teens and early 20s, who were brought to the United States as infants and children. It was not their conscious decision to come to this country; it was a decision by their parents. They have grown up in the United States.

It is estimated that 2.5 million young people came to this country under these circumstances. So many of them have done everything they have been asked to do—completed their education, stood up in a classroom every morning and pledged allegiance to that flag—the only flag they have ever known, become part of America, excelled academically, started dreaming about what they might do as Americans to make their lives better and this country better.

But the law in the United States is very harsh when it comes to these young people. In its bleakest terms, the law says they have to leave the United States for 10 years and petition to come back in. Here they are, 18, 19 years of age, being told: Now that you have graduated from high school, whatever your status, leave. Go back somewhere where you cannot ever remember living and wait 10 years.

So I introduced the DREAM Act, and I said: If these young people have completed their education, if they have no serious criminal issues, if they are prepared to come forward, serve their country in the military or finish their college education, we will give them a path to citizenship.

Fifteen years of waiting—I can remember when these galleries were filled with young people, DREAMers, undocumented young people who sat one Saturday morning in their caps and gowns in the gallery, praying that we would pass the DREAM Act and give them a chance to become part of the only country they have ever known.

The measure failed on the floor of the Senate. It was a brokenhearted moment for me, facing these young people, many of them in tears, sobbing, not knowing what their lives would lead to. I said to them: If you will not give up on me, I am not going to give up on you. Let's keep working at this.

I sent a letter in April of 2010 to my friend, the President of the United States, who had been a cosponsor of the DREAM Act, and I said to President Obama: Can you do something? Can you do something to allow these young people to have a chance? Give them a chance. And he did.

He came through with a program called DACA. This deferred action program was really designed to give these young people a temporary stay from deportation. It is only temporary, for several years. But in order to get that stay, they had to come forward; they had to register with the government, pay a filing fee, make sure all their vital information had been disclosed, and go through a thorough criminal background check. Then, if they got a job, they would pay their taxes, as required of every person living in this country, and they would have a temporary stay of deportation to stay here, go to school, or work. Several years later, they would have to do it all over again and go through the same background check and pay the same fees.

The President signed that Executive action and said it was within his authority as Chief Executive to decide what are the highest priorities as to who should be deported from the United States.

The President rightly said: Let's go after felons and dangerous criminals. They shouldn't be part of our country.

Why would we go after these young people who only want to complete their education and be a positive part of our future? So the President signed the Executive action for DACA.

Sometime later came an opportunity to consider families in similar circumstances. Most people have a mistaken notion that if you are undocumented, everybody in your home is undocumented. I haven't found that to be the case. More often than not, only one parent would be undocumented. The father may be an American citizen. All the kids may be American citizens, but mom may be undocumented.

The President put in another proposal and said: In those circumstances where you have someone undocumented in the country with a child who is an American citizen, you can apply for what is known as DAPA, which gave them the same temporary stay of deportation. You had to pay your filing fee, go through a criminal background check, pay taxes on any money you earned, and for a temporary period of time, you would not be deported.

When the President signed that second Executive action, a number of Governors, Republicans from across the States, filed an action to stop the implementation of the President's Executive action. That is a big deal. It literally affects millions of people in this country who are undocumented. These Governors argued that if they were forced, for example, in the State of Texas to give drivers' licenses to undocumented people, they would have administrative expenses so the President's order would create a hardship on their State. Of course, what they failed to acknowledge was these new people under the Executive order would be paying taxes, legally paying their taxes to the Federal and State government, and they would pay any fee necessary to get a driver's license imposed by the State of Texas.

The case went before the Supreme Court. The decision was handed down a few minutes ago. The decision of the Supreme Court, sadly, shows the terrible human cost of the Senate Republican strategy to recklessly refuse to fill the vacancy on the Supreme Court created by the death of Justice Scalia.

You know what happened several months ago when Justice Scalia was on a hunting trip and sadly passed away, to the shock of everyone. There was a vacancy on the Supreme Court. The President of the United States did what he was supposed to do. In article II of the Constitution, there is a requirement the President fill the vacancies on the Supreme Court. Why would the Founding Fathers put a requirement on the President? They understood some President could play games with vacancies on the Court.

They said: No, you have to send your nominee's name to the U.S. Senate where we will have the opportunity to advise and consent as to that nominee.

The President met his responsibility. Judge Merrick Garland works for the DC Court of Appeals. In fact, he is the Chief Judge of the DC Circuit. The President sent his name to fill the Scalia vacancy.

Is Merrick Garland qualified? The American Bar Association this week said what we already knew: Merrick Garland is unanimously well-qualified for the position. The President's nominee at that point would come before the Senate. In the history of the United States, we have never ever denied a nominee for the Supreme Court vacancy a hearing and a vote in the United States—never—until this very moment when the Republican leadership in the U.S. Senate said: No, we are not going to fill the vacancy because we are hoping our Presidential candidate—in this case, Mr. Donald Trump—will be able to fill that vacancy so we will keep the vacancy open for our dream candidate, President Donald Trump.

It is the first time in the history of the United States, the Senate has turned its back on a Presidential request to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court.

We warned the Republicans this could create some problems. Today we see exactly the kind of problem that can be created. The ''human cost of Senate Republicans' reckless refusal to fill the vacancy on the Supreme Court'' is going to be felt by literally millions of people. Today the Supreme Court failed to resolve the legal challenge to DAPA and expanded DACA, the Executive orders of President. The result of that 4-to-4 tie vote leaves millions of families across America in legal limbo.

I urge this Justice Department to consider all the legal options to swiftly overturn the injunction that is blocking President Obama from using his legal authority to set immigration enforcement priorities. DAPA and an expanded DACA will make our country safer and allow law-abiding individuals with deep roots in our communities to step out of the shadows and contribute more fully to the country they love.

A tie vote on the U.S. Supreme Court—I can't remember the last time that happened. It happens very rarely. It didn't have to happen. If the Senate Republican majority had done its job, had faced its constitutional responsibility, held a hearing for Merrick Garland and voted him up or down, I have confidence he would have been approved and been a member of this U.S. Supreme Court. We could have avoided what we now face—a split Court, 4 to 4, which cannot resolve critical and controversial issues.

The net result of the Republican refusal to fill that vacancy is to create an injustice across America for millions living in this country, an uncertainty about their future. That is the height of constitutional irresponsibility, and it played out across the street and was announced just minutes ago. This is what happens when the Senate Republicans refuse to do their job, when they say we are going to play politics with filling a vacancy on the Supreme Court. We are going to hope and pray Donald Trump will come forward and fill this vacancy with somebody we like a little better than the nominee of President Obama.

It is a sad day, and now we know what this constitutional irresponsibility by the Senate Republicans has done. It has created a fractured Court. It has split our Nation in terms of the law. It has derogated one of the most important institutions in our government. I hope a few Republicans will step up and realize that waiting for President Trump to fill this vacancy is the wrong answer.

We need to accept the Constitution's mandate to move quickly to fill this vacancy as quickly as possible. In the meantime, with the split Court decision, we need to call on our Justice Department to do everything possible to try to find a path toward a just resolution, which the Supreme Court was unable to find today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Mr. KING. Mr. President, I first want to begin by reading a note I got this morning at 7 o'clock from a member of my staff in Maine. I think it speaks to the issues we are discussing today in this body and should be discussing in the other body.

My regional representative said:

> Last night I attended the Southern Maine Planning and Development Corporation Annual Meeting in Sanford.

That is a town in Southern Maine.

> From the time I walked in the door, through dinner and even walking back to my car, every single person I spoke with either wanted me to convey their thanks to Senator King for his stand on ''doing something on gun control'' to asking me that he stand firm and do more. People who own guns (and said so) and those who don't. Every single person expressed dismay that Congress has not acted on this. Many mentioned the sit-in in the House of Representatives and were shocked that the issue would not even get a vote. Many wanted to know when the vote would be taken in the Senate.
>
> People in Maine, including responsible gun owners, want more background checks and limitations on those who raise red flags. They want common sense legislation. I had to send this because I was quite surprised at the total focus on this issue.

I hope we will have before us sometime today an amendment which I consider a national security issue. Since being in this body, I have been privileged to serve on both the Armed Services and Intelligence Committees and have studied and worked on and listened to hearing after hearing on the terrorism threat to this country. Something important has to happen with regard to that threat over the last 3 or 4 years.

We have moved into a new era of threats to our country, different than the terrorism threat we found ourselves facing after 9/11. In 2001, that plot was hatched overseas, it involved foreigners who got to our shores one way or another and performed a heinous attack on our country.

Now we are facing attacks from within—people who are already here are radicalized online and receive what I call a terrorist APB from ISIS or Al Qaeda that basically says: Go out and do harm to Americans. The difference is the threat is now here and not abroad—although, it may be inspired and, in some cases, directed from abroad. I call this terrorism 2.0. It raises an entirely new national security issue for us; that is, how do these terrorists obtain arms? With ISIS, if we are aware of an arms shipment or a cache of arms somewhere in Syria or Iraq, we take it out. We send our fighter planes. We send any resources we have to keep them from getting those arms. If an ISIS-inspired terrorist in the United States wants to obtain arms, all they have to do is go to a gun store and buy them. It makes no sense to me that we spend millions of dollars to keep arms away from terrorists in the Middle East and do nothing to keep arms away from terrorists in the United States. That is why I am supporting, along with a bipartisan group, a nonpartisan group of other Senators, led by SUSAN COLLINS of Maine, a commonsense piece of legislation that will simply add to the list of those items which prohibit people from getting guns if you are on the no-fly list or the selectee list—those people who are required to have additional screening at an airport.

This is about as simple and as common sense as it gets. To vote against this is basically saying it is OK with us that terrorist people on the no-fly list get a gun. I can't understand any argument that would justify that. The provision Senator COLLINS has painstakingly developed, with consultation with both sides of the aisle, has in it due process protections for someone who may be on one of these lists, either inadvertently through a mistake or improperly. They have the opportunity to say: I shouldn't be on the list, I should be able to buy a gun, and they have an opportunity to make that case in a very limited period of time and to have their chance to obtain full due process to protect their constitutional right.

This is a well-balanced, thoughtful proposal. It is not taking anybody's guns. It is not a ban on any kind of weapon. It simply says: No guns for terrorists. It seems to me that is a basic, commonsense amendment, and I really can't understand why it has become so difficult to move it forward.

We had a filibuster last week. As a result of that filibuster, we ended up having several votes on this issue earlier this week, and I hope and believe we are going to have at least one more either today or early next week on the Collins amendment.

However, in the House of Representatives, there is no vote whatsoever, to the point where Members of the House have had to take to the floor and literally take over the floor and say: We are not leaving until we get a vote. I guess I would call it a House version of a filibuster. I think it is important to emphasize that the people in the House are not saying ''We are going to stay here until we pass legislation,'' they are saying ''Let's have a vote. That is our job.''

If you ask any sixth grader what Senators and Representatives do, they will tell you that we vote on legislation. That is what we are supposed to be doing, and that is why we are here.

I find it inexplicable that the majority in the House adjourned to take a vacation for the next 10 days without even allowing a vote or any debate on this issue. I mean, it looks ridiculous to the people of this country. My suspicion is that when many of those Representatives get home over the next few days, their constituents are going to say: What gives? This thing about terrorists seems to make sense to me. Why didn't you get something done on this?

I hope and believe that is what will happen. But for the Members of the House to take this extraordinary step, which I understand has only happened one or two other times in our history, in order to simply get a vote on an issue that is an absolute top-of-the-line concern to the people of the United States, again—it just doesn't make sense.

One of the reasons Congress is held in such low esteem is because we are not doing our jobs. People send us here to do a job and wrestle with difficult issues, not to suppress them, not to push them under the rug, not to ignore them, but to debate and discuss and try to come up with commonsense solutions. Indeed, that is what we have done here in the Senate.

I have been working on this for the past 48 hours. I have had consultations with other Senators. We are trying to get the language right and trying to find ways to accommodate various interests and concerns about this bill, and hopefully we will get to the floor and have a vote. The other body is not allowing that to happen.

I think this is an issue of real importance to the American people, and I sense a very significant change in terms of people's views on this issue. I understand there was a poll released just this morning which showed that 85 to 90 percent of the American people believe we should try to keep guns out of the hands of terrorists—no fly, no buy. It is a very simple message. Interestingly, that showed that the highest percentage of people who agreed with that proposition were Republicans. Ninety percent of the Republicans who responded to the CNN poll felt that terrorists should be kept from getting guns, and that is what this amendment which we are going to be considering is all about.

It seems to me that this is a case where Congress has an opportunity to do what we are supposed to do, which is not to avoid, not to obfuscate, not to sweep under the rug, but to act. I can't presuppose the outcome. I believe and hope that the outcome will be positive and that we will take action on this commonsense amendment Senator COLLINS has developed, but at least let's act. I hope the other body will do the same thing. To adjourn for a recess prematurely simply because they don't want to confront or discuss or debate this issue brings discredit on this entire institution and is greatly to be regretted.

I come from a State that believes in the Second Amendment. I believe in the Second Amendment. I have insisted through this process that anything that limits a person's ability to get guns if they are on a no-fly list or a selectee list needs to have due process in order to be sure that they are properly on that list and that there is good cause for them not to be able to purchase guns. I believe that process should be there, and it is there. This is in no way a violation of the Second Amendment. It is in no way an effort to take anybody's guns away. It is an effort to keep guns out of the hands of people who shouldn't have them. And the Supreme Court has affirmed over and over—even Justice Scalia has affirmed directly and unequivocally—that this is appropriate under the Second Amendment.

I commend my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have developed this commonsense proposal. I hope we can pass it today by an overwhelming vote, and maybe that will help persuade the other body to at least consider, discuss, debate, and then vote on this issue that is of vital concern to the American people.

I yield the floor to the Senator from Delaware.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RUBIO). The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I appreciate the chance to follow the Senator from Maine this morning. If I could, I wish to briefly talk about the appropriations bill for the Departments of Commerce and Justice and major science agencies, including the National Science Foundation.

I commend the senior Senators from Alabama and Maryland for their bipartisan work on what I think we all know is important legislation. I have been told that it was reported out of the Appropriations Committee on a unanimous vote. They have worked hard to juggle many competing priorities, from keeping our country safe, to creating jobs through trade, economic development, science, and innovation.

This legislation provides critical resources and needed oversight for many issues that are important to the Committee on Homeland Security, which I serve on as the ranking member.

Just one example of many in this appropriations bill is the Census Bureau. The 2010 census was by far the costliest census in the history of our country. It faced serious technology failures, and that is why it is critical that we learn from the last decade's mistakes and make sure the 2020 census is on time, on budget, and most importantly, accurate.

I am encouraged that the Bureau has provided a plan for the 2020 count that could save $5 billion and reduce the cost per household by almost 30 percent compared to the 2010 census—30-percent savings. Now we need to do our job here in Congress by providing the resources and oversight necessary to help the Census Bureau achieve those goals, and if we do our job, they can and they will.

This appropriations bill also funds the FBI, our domestic counterterrorism agency. As we know, the FBI is on the job not just 8 hours a day, 5 days a week; they are on the job 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They are on the job around the clock, and they do this to keep all of us in this country safe from terrorism and violent crimes.

ISIS

Mr. President, as we consider this legislation to fight terrorism at home, I also want to take just a few minutes today to discuss the progress we are making to defeat the terrorists—ISIS in this case—on the battlefields far away from our homes. We are going to have a chance to look at a visual here in just a moment.

Yesterday on the Senate floor, I heard several of my colleagues in the majority claim that our President and our administration have not done enough to fight ISIS; however, I think our friends in the majority are forgetting a few key facts, and I just wanted to dwell on those for a little bit this morning.

The truth is that we are taking the fight to ISIS, and we are making serious progress in the battle to degrade and destroy them. When I say ''we,'' I am not just talking about the United States, Canada, and maybe parts of Europe; I am talking about a coalition that now includes 60 nations from around the world, including some that are Muslim nations, and I think they are an important part of this coalition.

We have this map here, and just for a little familiarity, this is Iraq over here and the Al Anbar Province. This is Baghdad, and this is a town called Fallujah that we have heard a lot about in recent years and especially in recent days. There is a place up here called Tikrit, which is Saddam Hussein's hometown, and up here is a town called Mosul, which is pretty important. This is the Kurdish part of Iraq, if you will. This part over here, frankly, doesn't have a lot of people, but it has a lot of land.

Over here in Syria, there is a Syrian town called Raqqah that is the stronghold for ISIS, and this is part of the caliphate, or what they would like to have as part of their caliphate. This is Syria, Damascus, Lebanon, and this place is called Aleppo.

If you go back a year or so, the areas in green and salmon were sort of the high-water mark for ISIS in terms of land that they were in control of, and what has happened in recent months is that this coalition of 60 nations has stopped that.

Everyone remembers the ''Star Wars'' movie ''The Empire Strikes Back.'' Well, in this case, the coalition is striking back.

About half of the area within Iraq, which is green, was controlled by ISIS maybe 1 or 2 years ago, and about half of that has been reclaimed.

The biggest battle that is going on right now is in Fallujah, where the coalition forces, largely led by the Iraqi ground troops—not American ground troops but largely led by Iraqi ground troops—have taken over center city, and they are battling it out with ISIS forces in some of the neighborhoods. Hopefully they will be successful, and I think they will be.

The next big battle will be up here in Mosul. I am a retired Navy captain. I spent a lot of time fighting in a hot war in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam war and spent another 19 years in the Cold War as a P–3 aircraft mission commander. So I served in a hot war and I served for a long time in a cold war.

When we have a coalition this large, every station doesn't do the same thing because that would be foolish. What Americans bring to the battle is some of the equipment and training that are needed. We provide intelligence, air support, and special forces and counterterrorism troops—not tens of thousands of them, but they are in the thousands in all. That is what we bring to the battle. We don't have a lot of boots on the ground. Some people are on the ground, but for the most part, that is not what we do.

The Iraqi Army, which did not distinguish itself well 1 or 2 years ago when ISIS pushed through this part of Syria and Iraq—as of today, the Iraqis are getting their act together, and they have some special forces, although I don't think that is what they call themselves, but I think their special forces are actually pretty darn good in terms of their capability. They are very much involved in the efforts

around Fallujah, and I am sure they are involved in Tikrit, which, again, was a former stronghold and the hometown of Saddam Hussein.

I think some other fighting is going on right here in Hit.

So the coalition is striking back in Iraq.

There are interesting things going on in Syria. Again, the area shown in salmon is still controlled by ISIS, and while this land mass is controlled by the so-called caliphate, I think that is steadily being eroded.

But what is going on in Raqqah is interesting. We have the Russians providing air support. The troops loyal to President Assad of Syria—most of the world thinks he should step down at some point as President and then put a new kind of government together there—are pushing up from the southwest with support from Russian air. This area has U.S. air support, and we have coalition forces—the coalition we are an active part of. We have a squeeze movement going on here in Raqqah.

Is the battle over? No, it is not. Is it going in the right direction? Finally, after a tough couple of years, I think it is.

I want to mention a couple of metrics that I think are good for us to keep in mind. Again, at the height of its power, ISIS controlled all of the area shown in green and salmon, right here on the outskirts of Baghdad. In recent months, ISIS has lost the area in green. They still control the salmon area, but as you can see, the coalition forces are on the march, and that is good.

ISIS has lost, again, half of the land they controlled in Iraq. They have lost about 20 percent of the land they controlled in Syria. And there is real pressure being brought on the key city that they control, Raqqa.

Ramadi is a good victory for our troops, for our coalition—and Tikrit, which is right here, and Mosul is this area where we have coalition forces. They pretty much encircled Mosul, and they are preparing to enter that city in the weeks to come.

As we speak, Kurdish, Iraqi, and Syrian forces, backed by the U.S. Special Forces, are making preparations again to take Mosul, right there, and Raqqa—an interesting coalition between the Russians and the Syrian fighters.

We have cut ISIS funds, I am told, by up to a third. We have literally destroyed a lot of their money. We found out where they are hiding their cash and literally bombed it and destroyed hundreds of millions of dollars they were using to pay soldiers and provide for things they needed to fight their war.

We have also killed 25,000 ISIS fighters and, more recently, 120 of their key leaders.

We have drastically slowed the flow of foreign recruits from a high of about 2,000 per month down to about 200 per month. The folks who were joining up with ISIS 2 years ago, when they were on the margin trying to create this caliphate right here—that stopped, and the enthusiasm for their ability to actually recruit people has diminished dramatically. When this big fight for this whole area right here was underway 2 years ago, there were I think about 2,000 people a month showing up from around the world who wanted to be a part of this fight with ISIS. Today it is not 2,000 people a month; it is about 200 from around the world. The United States 2 years ago had about 10 Americans per month leaving the United States and going to join forces with ISIS to be a part of this. It is not 10 a month now; it is about one.

The folks who are turning out, whether from the United States, are down dramatically, or from around the world, are down dramatically. Those guys want to be a part of a winning team. Our job—the coalition's job—is to make it clear that ISIS might have been a winning team 2 years ago when all of this was going on right here, but they are not a winning team today. They are back on their heels. We are pushing them hard, and we are making very slow but steady progress. I wouldn't overstate it—slow but steady progress. If we keep working together, we will make a whole lot more progress.

There is an African proverb the Presiding Officer has probably heard before, and it goes something like this. If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, travel together. We are doing this together with a lot of other countries from around the world. It is taking a while to get our acts together. For somebody who has flown in a war and worked in places where we have coalition forces from other nations, sometimes speaking different languages, not used to working with one another, it takes a while to get going, and I think we have made progress in that regard.

What is going on now that ISIS is doing badly on the battlefield? They are still using social media to try to project the idea that they are doing just fine and things are going just hunky-dory. These guys are really good at social media. What they are trying to do is to win through social media in the United States what they have been unable to win on the battlefield.

One of the things ISIS tries to do in recruiting people in this country is to convince them that there is going to be a caliphate and that they could be part of a winning team. What we want to make very clear is that this isn't going to be a winning team for much longer. In fact, the winning part of their season is behind them, and what lies ahead is not good.

I will use a sports metaphor here. There were the big NBA finals a couple of nights ago, about a week ago, where the Cleveland Cavaliers made kind of an amazing comeback when they won three straight games at the end and became the NBA champs against a very good team from California. I happened to be in Cleveland for the funeral for George Voinovich the day of the finals, and everywhere I looked I saw people wearing Cavaliers shirts, hats, and other paraphernalia. My guess is, after the day of the game when Cleveland won the championship, you saw even more of that all over Ohio and throughout the country. Wherever Cleveland Cavaliers fans might be, they brought out their allegiance to their team. It was probably a little bit less on the Golden State Warrior side after they lost, despite the fact that they played brilliantly.

It is really important that we make clear and continue to make clear on the battlefield who is winning—our coalition, and who is losing—ISIS. That reduces dramatically the ability of ISIS to radicalize and recruit people here in this country who want to do harm, hurt people, kill people in this Nation.

So first, degrade and destroy—that is going on. And second, make sure the message is clear that progress is being made on our side by our forces, and the coalition is moving forward.

I think that is about it. I see my colleague on the other side, and I will allow him to take the field, so I yield. Thank you very much for the time to share these thoughts today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

FIGHTING TERRORISM

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, before I get started on what I really want to talk about today, which is the real threat facing our Nation, I want to reflect for a few moments on the antics and the theater that are going on in the House of Representatives.

The Presiding Officer and I were both Speakers of the House in his great State of Florida and my great State of North Carolina. I don't know about you, but the business of the House is more important than the antics that we see going on there. If it were my Chamber, it would be cleared, and people would be arrested if that is what is necessary to get us back to the task at hand. We have a number of things to work on, including economic security, national security, homeland security. And why people would use the pulpit of the House floor—the House Chamber—to advance their political agenda, to advance their fundraising—go to the political Web sites and see how many of them have sent out an email in the past couple of days and in the past week exploiting a tragic situation in Orlando for their political purposes. I think it is disgusting, and I am disappointed.

I think what we need to do is recognize—and I should say before I get started—that there are issues with handguns going into the hands of people who are mentally ill. There is no doubt about it. We should have a discussion to figure out how to fix that.

Let's continue to have a debate about how we keep guns out of the hands of terrorists, out of the hands of felons, out of the hands of people with mental illness, and recognize that the real threat to this Nation is terror and terrorism.

Make no mistake, in Orlando on June 12, that was an act of terror. The perpetrator was either self-radicalized or maybe even radicalized through some contact with terrorist organizations, but it is a death call that wants to destroy our way of life. It is actually a death call that particularly focuses on the LGBT community. They are murdering thousands of people in the Middle East, many of them simply because they are gay.

So we have to recognize—and make no mistake, while this attack occurred in Orlando, it could happen anywhere in the United States. Why is that so?

The distinguished Senator from Delaware talked about progress we are making with ISIS. He said we are having fewer foreign fighters. Do we know why? Because ISIS has figured out how to radicalize people in the Nation where they live. We have seen it in San Bernardino, in Orlando, and at Fort Hood. How long do we have to take before we recognize the fundamental threat to this Nation is terror and ISIS spreading its tentacles into our own homeland?

The distinguished Senator from Delaware is a good friend of mine, and we have worked together on legislation. For those in the gallery, this is an opportunity to hear two very different perspectives on the situation we are dealing with now.

I don't think we are making progress. I think when someone comes before the Senate Armed Services Committee or comes before the Judiciary Committee and tells us that the numbers of threats in the United States are greater than at any time since 9/11, that is not progress. When the FBI Director tells me that they have about 1,000 cases similar to what we saw in Orlando that they have to research every year, that is not progress. When we find out that there are investigations—active investigations—that have the potential threat of what we saw in Orlando in every single State, that is not progress.

The reason for this is that his own administration is at odds with what he says publicly. He doesn't want to discuss his own party; he doesn't want to discuss the threat of radical Islamic terror.

Over the past week, the Attorney General said that the ultimate solution to terror is compassion, unity, and love. How many people think that ISIS, Al-Nusra, Hamas, Hezbollah, and all the other terror organizations—the Iran terror network—do we honestly believe they will respond to compassion, unity, and love? We need to have compassion, unity, and love in our communities. We need to pour our hearts out to the people who were victims in Orlando; we need to show compassion and love to that community. But ISIS isn't going to respond to that.

I want to give some examples of why I think the President isn't listening to the heroes and the experts in his own administration. Starting on January 20, 2015, the President said: ''We are leading a broad coalition to degrade and ultimately destroy this terror group.''

The former CIA Director and Secretary of Defense in the Obama administration—a month after the President said that—said: ''To destroy ISIS with the means he has approved so far, I think that's an unattainable objective.''

Whom do we believe, somebody who wakes up every morning and looks at this threat, or the President, who doesn't want to communicate the reality to the American people?

Now let's go to the next one from last November. The President bragged that his nonexistent strategy to defeat ISIS was succeeding. He said: ''Our goal has been first to contain, and we have contained them''—''them'' being ISIL or ISIS.

This American hero, former Commandant of the Marine Corps, now Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, within 2 months said: ''We have not contained ISIL.''

Which one do we believe, the one who had the confidence of the Marine Corps to have him be their Commandant, and now Joint Chiefs of Staff, or someone who is apparently not listening?

The day after the terrorist attack on American soil, President Obama made another bold statement. He said: ''ISIL is not going to pose an existential threat to us. We have hardened our defenses. Our homeland has never been more protected.''

A week later, another Obama administration official—an extraordinarily talented and bright person, head of the FBI, Director James Comey, poured cold water over that statement. He said: ''Their ability to have a safe haven from which to gather resources, people, and plan and plot increases the risk of their ability to mount a sophisticated attack against the homeland.''

He said ''increases the risk''—from the FBI Director that was put in that administration by President Obama.

Now we have one more. With the President's disconnection from his administration, we have to realize the rhetoric and the reality is just not matching. On June 14, 2 days after the Orlando shooting, President Obama again insisted that ISIS is on the run. He stated: ''We are making significant progress. This campaign at this stage is firing on all cylinders. As a result, ISIL is under more pressure than ever before.''

Two days later—I have said to my colleagues over the past week and a half—2 days later, the President's Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, John Brennan, made a dramatically contradictory assessment: ''Despite all of our progress against ISIL in the battlefield and on the ground, our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach.''

The CIA Director's comments are incredibly straightforward. ISIL still presents a threat to our homeland and to our allies.

Every Senator knows this reality in addition to the hearing and public statements. I have gone to the Middle East. I have traveled to Saudi Arabia, to Iraq, to the Kurdish region of Iraq, Afghanistan, Jordan, and Egypt. To a person, they say the President is in denial. We are not taking the fight to ISIL.

What happens when you don't take the fight to your enemy? They bring the fight to you. That is what we are seeing with these self-radicalized or ISIS-inspired radicals in this Nation, and there is a growing number—1,000 active investigations going on every year.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have to recognize that ISIS and these terrorist organizations are very sophisticated. They have a platform that in no other time in our history any other foes have ever had—social media. They have gotten to where they need to disperse into the community. The threat to the homeland is not decreasing, it is increasing. We have to recognize that. We have to have a President who either gets out of denial, when the administration tells him what the real threats are, or stops pretending that we are doing well.

We have a threat to this homeland. We have a threat to our men and women in uniform who have sworn to go overseas to defend the freedom of other countries and to defend our freedom. We have an obligation in this body. The President has an obligation to recognize we are not winning. I am not saying this as a Republican trying to build political rhetoric. I am saying this because the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the FBI Director, and key officials in this President's administration are saying this.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that over the course of the next week we can focus on the real problem. God forbid that another Orlando happens in this Nation. I think it is even more important. We need to recognize that this is a very, very unsafe world we live in. We need to recognize that Democrats and Republicans have to solve that problem. We need to continue to look for ways to keep guns out of the hands of terrorists. I should add: Why don't we come up with a policy where if it were implemented, maybe Orlando could have been prevented? But the policy offered by my Democratic colleagues on the other side of the aisle last week wouldn't have done it, and they acknowledge that. Let's focus on policies where they will.

Our Nation deserves a leader who listens to his experts. Our Nation deserves a leader who will take the fight

to ISIS, and our Nation will be less safe unless our President recognizes that as his No. 1 goal.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

WE THE PEOPLE ACT

Mr. UDALL. Thank you, Mr. President, for the recognition. In 5 months, Americans will go to the polls and vote. That is our heritage, and it is something to celebrate and something to protect. But this year, many Americans are fed up with our political system. They are tired of corporations and the super wealthy controlling our politicians and our elections. They don't trust our democracy to reflect the will of ''we the people.''

What has changed since our Founding Fathers began the Constitution with these words? What has changed since several decades ago when many more Americans had more confidence in our government?

I will tell you what I think has changed. People are now questioning the integrity of our elections. Our campaign finance system is under siege, drowning in record amounts of money, much of it from outside groups and much of it hidden money—dark money. Our elections should not be for sale to the highest bidder.

Over 150 years ago, Abraham Lincoln saw the danger of too much money in politics. Lincoln warned about ''corruption in high places . . . until the Republic is destroyed.''

We are reaching that point. Money has poisoned our political system. It is no wonder the American people have lost faith in us with this constant money chasing from special interests and very little else getting done.

Our constituents want Congress to get to work and to work together, finding real solutions to real problems. That is why a few months ago several of my colleagues and I got together to discuss the state of our democracy, our electoral system, and our political system. The question we asked ourselves was this: What can we do to repair this damage and return the government to the people?

The product of those meetings is the bill we introduced last week, the We the People Act. It will bring dark money out of the shadows, create a real watchdog to enforce campaign finance laws, and rein in the influence of special interests and lobbyists. The We the People Act includes my constitutional amendment to allow Congress and the States to enact even more significant reforms—reforms five conservative Justices on the Supreme Court can't overturn.

We are offering this to start a conversation about what needs to be done to fix a broken system. I hope it will even lead to our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to join us in this effort.

I want to talk specifically about two sections of the bill. My colleague Senator MERKLEY will be here momentarily to talk about some of the other portions of the bill that are especially important to him.

The first is the ''Democracy for All'' constitutional amendment, which I introduced after the Supreme Court's disastrous Citizens United ruling when the Court put a ''for sale'' sign on our elections. Changing the Constitution is a big step. I know that. As James Madison said, it should be amended only on ''great and extraordinary occasions.'' I agree, but I also believe we have reached one of those rare occasions. Citizens United was wrong, it is dangerous, and it cannot stand.

Amending the Constitution can take a long time, but this movement actually was started decades ago by a Republican. Many of our predecessors from both parties understood the danger. They knew that money had a corrosive impact on our elections. They spent years championing the cause.

Senator Ted Stevens, a Republican icon from Alaska, introduced a constitutional amendment to overturn Buckley v. Valeo in 1983. He saw the effect that unlimited campaign expenditures were having on Congress over three decades ago. He recognized over 30 years ago that we were in an arms race. But the drive for money would only get worse and Congress's ability to function would suffer.

That was only the beginning. In every Congress from the 99th to the 108th, Senator Fritz Hollings introduced bipartisan constitutional amendments very similar to the one that I am offering this year. Senator SCHUMER and Senator COCHRAN continued the effort in the 109th Congress. Even Majority Leader MCCONNELL once had his own constitutional amendment to limit the influence of money on our elections. That was all before the Citizens United and McCutcheon decisions by the Supreme Court. It was before things went from bad to worse. The out-of-control spending since those decisions has further poisoned our elections.

In a few minutes Senator MERKLEY and I and our colleagues will hold a press conference about this bill. We will highlight the growth of one special interest group that has increased its spending exponentially since Citizens United. That group is the NRA.

Fueled with contributions from gun manufacturers, it has Republicans so scared they don't even hold a vote on commonsense steps to protect families from gun violence, even when Americans are crying out for action, even after tragedies like Sandy Hook and Orlando, even when Democrats are holding a protest in the House Chamber itself.

I went to stand with them for a while yesterday. Republicans could loosen the hold the NRA has over themselves and the Congress if they would join us in this effort to reform our elections as they have in the past. I know the political climate of an election year makes it even more difficult, but I will reintroduce this amendment in the next Congress and the next, and I hope my Republican colleagues will join me.

Poll after poll shows that our constituents across the political spectrum want this amendment. New York just became the 17th State calling for Congress to pass this constitutional amendment. It is time we listened to the States.

I would also like to talk about my bill to replace the dysfunctional Federal Election Commission with a new organization. We would replace it with what we call the Federal Election Administration. It is also included in the We the People Act. My constitutional amendment would allow Congress to finally enact meaningful reforms. Meanwhile, it is more important than ever to have a cop on the beat enforcing the rules on the books. That job is supposed to go to the Federal Election Commission, but in today's hyperpartisan environment, the FEC is powerless to enforce the law. Gridlock is pervasive. One of its own Commissioners admitted that there is a slim chance they would be able to do anything this year. She called it ''worse than dysfunctional.'' The New York Times editorial board called the FEC ''borderline useless.'' Reform groups have dubbed it a different kind of FEC. They call it the ''Failure to Enforce Commission.''

It is time to replace the FEC with a new agency that is empowered to keep a close eye on the candidates, super PACs, and the parties and that will finally crack down on election law violations.

My friend Senator JOHN MCCAIN was one of the first to propose abolishing the FEC as we know it and to create a new bipartisan agency with the teeth it needs to do the job. He and Senator Feingold introduced this bill several times in several Congresses.

The Federal Election Administration Act will eliminate the FEC and start afresh. There will be a new sheriff in town standing up for voters nationwide. My constitutional amendment and the Federal Election Administration Act are just two pieces of the ''we the people'' reform package. My colleagues will discuss the measures they have contributed to this effort. Senators WHITEHOUSE, LEAHY, KING, BALDWIN, and BENNET all have important pieces in this legislative package.

Let me be clear. This is just a starting point. The We the People Act includes many important reforms, but there are additional issues we must address to return democracy to the people. We must ensure every American has access to the polls. We need to end the gerrymandering of congressional districts—a practice that allows incumbents to stay in office indefinitely—and we must enact comprehensive public financing that will empower small donors and make their voices heard again. This is an opportunity for Congress to respond to the American people. They want and demand reform.

Congress has a long history of regulating campaign finance, often in the wake of scandal. Since 1867 we have had the Pendleton Act, the Tillman Act, the Federal Corrupt Practices Act of 1925, the Hatch Act, the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974, and the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002. First scandal and then reform is the unfortunate pattern. It is a pattern that we can break with the We the People Act. Let's reform the system before there is another major scandal. Let's respond to the voters—Republicans and Democrats—who want a better government, a government of ''we the people.''

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a summary of the We the People Act be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

SUMMARY OF THE ''WE THE PEOPLE'' ACT—S. 6, INTRODUCED JUNE 16, 2016

All Americans deserve a government that works hard to provide economic opportunity and a level playing field for every citizen and family. Unfortunately, today many American families are struggling, yet special interest corporations are using their lobbyists and influence to write the rules of government so it works for them. That's why we have introduced the ''We the People'' Act, a bold new plan to take back our democracy from special interest corporations and lobbyists. This legislation would increase public reporting and transparency of secret money in our elections, strengthen the lobbying laws in Washington, and put new limits on unlimited campaign contributions flowing in ever since the disastrous Citizens United Supreme Court decision.

MAKE GOVERNMENT MORE ACCOUNTABLE THROUGH CAMPAIGN DISCLOSURE AND TRANSPARENCY

Mandatory disclosure of all special interest campaign donations. Citizens United unleashed a flood of undisclosed corporate dark money on our elections. This provision authored by Senator SHELDON WHITEHOUSE (D-RI) would require organizations spending money in elections—including super PACS and tax-exempt 501(c)(4) groups to promptly disclose donors who have given $10,000 or more during an election cycle. The provision includes robust transfer provisions to prevent political operatives from using complex webs of entities to game the system and hide donor identities.

Require all candidates for federal office to report major campaign contributions within 48 hours. Today, not all candidates for federal office report campaign contributions in real-time. This provision authored by Senator ANGUS KING (I-ME) requires all candidates for federal office, including those for the U.S. Senate, to report contributions of over $1000 to the FEC within 48 hours.

Reform the Federal Election Commission to ensure campaigns and special interests follow the law. This provision authored by Senator TOM UDALL (D-NM) replaces the dysfunctional Federal Election Commission (FEC) and creates a new independent agency to serve as a vigilant watchdog over our nation's campaign finance system. The newly established agency would consist of five commissioners appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate and would have greater enforcement and investigation powers than those of the gridlocked FEC. Unlike the existing FEC, the new agency would be empowered to hold candidates, politicians, and their financial supporters accountable for violating campaign finance laws.

Rein in the ''dark money'' SuperPACs. The Citizens United Supreme Court decision led to a huge growth in the amount of secret money ''SuperPACs.'' Senator PATRICK LEAHY (D-VT) has a provision that shuts down individual-candidate Super PACs and strengthens the rules that prohibit coordination between other outside spenders and candidates and parties.

STRENGTHEN THE LOBBYING LAWS TO LIMIT SPECIAL INTEREST INFLUENCE IN CONGRESS

Enact a permanent ban on lobbying by former Members of Congress. The current law prohibits Senators from lobbying for a two-year period after leaving Congress. House members have a one-year ban on lobbying. This provision authored by Senator MICHAEL BENNET (D-CO) permanently bans both House and Senate members from lobbying either house of Congress after they retire.

Close the reporting loopholes that allow consultants not to register as lobbyists. This provision authored by Senator MICHAEL BENNET (D-CO) requires lobbyists to register if he or she makes two or more lobbying contacts for a client over a two-year period, regardless of whether the lobbyist spends more than 20 percent of his or her time serving the particular client.

CLOSE THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY'S REVOLVING DOOR

Prohibit financial services companies from paying huge bonuses when employees take jobs in the federal government. It's hard for Americans to believe they have a government 'of the people, by the people, and for the people' when they see Wall Street banks paying their executives millions to take high level jobs in government—regulating their former industry. That's why Senator BALDWIN (D-WI) has a provision that prohibits private sector employers from offering bonuses to employees for leaving to join the government. Her bill also includes language to slow the revolving door by increasing cool down periods for those leaving government service and expanding recusal requirements for those entering.

AMEND THE CONSTITUTION TO STOP WEALTHY SPECIAL INTERESTS FROM MAKING UNLIMITED CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS

Overturn the Supreme Court's misguided decisions by amending the Constitution and putting real limits on campaign financing. This constitutional amendment resolution from Senator TOM UDALL (D-NM) provides Congress and the states with power to enact campaign finance reforms that withstand constitutional challenges. It would overturn Citizens United, McCutcheon, Buckley, and other bad precedents. Finally, it provides the authority to regulate and limit independent expenditures, including those made by corporations and Super PACs.

Mr. UDALL. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I rise to continue the discussion about ''We the People,'' those beautiful, first three words in our Constitution. My colleague from New Mexico has laid out the case that our Nation is far off track from our founding principles, and what is more ''founding'' than the very heart of our Constitution?

Our authors of the Constitution wrote these initial words in supersize font so decades or centuries later we would realize this is what our form of government is all about. It was not about a small group of highly powerful individuals charting the course of our country. It was not about a small group of highly privileged individuals charting the course for our country that our Nation was to be very different. It is symbolized by ''We the People'' or as summarized by President Lincoln many years later, ''a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.''

We are at a time now where this core principle is being profoundly challenged. Let's think for a moment about how Thomas Jefferson laid this out. He said we can claim to be a republic only to the degree that our decisions reflect the will of the people and that we can claim to be a republic only to the degree that the individuals within that government have an equal voice, so there is there principle. He referred to it as the ''mother principle,'' but the test of whether our government lived up to this vision of ''we the people'' would be whether our decisions reflect the will, and that would only be possible when the citizens each had an equal opportunity to participate.

In fact, today that vision of equal opportunity to participate has been profoundly undermined. We had a court case 40 years ago, Buckley v. Valeo, that basically said money is speech and money can be spent without limits.

We have the ongoing situation of the Court taking a look and saying corporations can be treated as if they were people. This gives a small group of individuals on the board of a corporation the assets of thousands or millions of Americans, and they can spend it at their will—never informing the people who own that money, the owners of the corporation, without ever informing them about the political positions they are taking. This is not free speech. This is stolen speech. If a group spends my money without telling me how they are spending my money, it is stolen speech. Yet that is what we have in Citizens United, a Supreme Court 5-to-4 decision that went way off track, a Supreme Court where the majority failed to understand what the heart of our democracy, our Republic, is all about.

If we turn the clock back, there was a world in which we had the town square, and the town square was free. Anyone could stand and express their position on a policy issue or express their position on a candidate. It didn't cost a thing. Then we evolved into the electronic age. The electronic age town square is on television, it is on the radio, and it is on the Internet. It costs a lot of money to participate. Then there was a Supreme Court that said we could spend unlimited sums, which means the affluent—whether they are a multimillionaire or a billionaire or a corporation—the powerful can buy up the town square and deliberately exclude the voice of the people. They can exercise a megaphone that is equivalent to that of a stadium sound system that drowns out the voice of the people. That is what our Supreme Court

has allowed to happen with our precious, our beautiful ''we the people'' Republic. This must not stand.

We see a multiplication of the corrupting influences embodied by these decisions. When the Senator from New Mexico and I were up for reelection in 2014, the Koch brothers decided to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to essentially buy control of this Chamber, the U.S. Senate. They spent their money in unlimited fashion. They did so in Louisiana and in Arkansas. They did it in North Carolina, Iowa, New Hampshire, and Michigan, in Colorado, Alaska, and—yes, my home State—Oregon. They won most of their cases. In most cases, their megaphone worked pretty well because that is what happens when you control the town square and exclude the people.

Now we have a Chamber that responds to the every whim of the Koch brothers like a puppet on a string, from the very first bill that was ever considered in this Chamber after my colleagues across the aisle took control, until now, where for the first time in U.S. history—the first time in U.S. history—the Republican Party, the majority party, has gone on a job strike, failing to fulfill their responsibility under our Constitution, a Constitution that carefully laid out a check called advice and consent. That check on nominations was laid out by Jefferson and Hamilton.

They said: We are going to place the responsibility for nominations with a single person because there is accountability, but we are concerned if that single person goes off track, if that single person hires cronies who are unqualified, hires people who don't have the appropriate background, then there has to be a body that says that individual is unfit—of ''unfit character'' is the term Hamilton used.

That is our responsibility, to decide if someone is of fit or unfit character. That is it. It isn't to utilize advice and consent, to undermine the executive branch, to undermine the courts. Yet that is the way it is being wielded at this very moment in the Senate. Never have we seen such an abuse of the Constitution as to fail to hold any effort to fulfill responsibilities to determine if a nominee is of fit character, a nominee for the Supreme Court.

This is a deliberate effort driven by the Koch brothers to pack the Supreme Court, to say we will go on a jobs strike for more than a year in the hopes that we can get a nominee to the far right who will support changing ''we the people'' to ''we the powerful,'' a nominee who will support changing ''we the people'' to ''we the privileged.'' That is the goal of the majority of this Chamber that has essentially been hired by the Koch brothers in the 2014 campaign.

We must reclaim our Republic. That is why this ''we the people'' legislative package that is put together is so important. The first major principle of this package is disclosure and transparency. Virtually every Member of this body has said disclosure is the sunlight that disinfects the political system, but when it came time to actually vote for disclosure, the Koch brothers intervened and said: No, no. That will take away some of our power, of the ultrawealthy, if we have to disclose what we are doing. Again, just like a puppet on a string, Members switched their positions—deeply disappointing—supporting the web of dark money entities.

We must change this. We must secure disclosure because it does help disinfect the political system. It may not completely cure the problem, but it is an important way to advance as a remedy.

The package includes Senator KING's Real Time Transparency Act to require all candidates for Federal office to report contributions of over $1,000 to the Federal Election Commission within 48 hours. That is a valuable addition to transparency.

It includes Senator LEAHY's Stop Super PAC-Candidate Coordination Act, which would end individual candidate super PACs and strengthen the rules, prohibiting coordination between outside entities that are super PACs and an individual's campaign because right now that coordination has grown to the extent it makes a mockery of the Supreme Court, drawing its distinction from third-party campaigns and an individual campaign.

It includes the Federal Election Administration Act from my colleague from New Mexico that he was speaking to just moments ago.

A second area the ''we the people'' package takes on is to take on lobbying and the revolving door. Senator BENNET has the Close the Revolving Door Act, which would put in effect a 6-year ban for congressional staff from lobbying and a lifetime ban for Members of Congress. If you have the honor and the privilege of serving in this Chamber, it shouldn't be that you do so with an eye to becoming a multimillion-dollar-per-year lobbyist when you resign. Yet that is all too common in the Halls of Congress, corrupting the responsibility we have to the American people. It also closes the lobbying registration loophole by requiring someone who has two or more lobbying contracts in a 2-year period to register as a lobbyist so it is more accurately understood when somebody is a paid advocate.

It also includes Senator BALDWIN's Financial Services Conflicts of Interest Act, which prohibits private sector employers from offering bonuses to employees for leaving to join the government. Picture this. A Wall Street firm says: Oh, you are going to serve in the Treasury Department, you are going to serve in the Securities and Exchange Commission, where you will have vast influence over the rules we live by. Great. We are going to give you a bonus. We will pay out that bonus at multiple thousands of dollars every month while you serve in the government. It is essentially a way for powerful entities to put a government employee on their payroll.

We have another problem. People leave these Commissions. They leave these appointments with the executive branch. They return to industry, and they get a platinum paycheck in appreciation for what they did for the industry while they were here in the Halls of Congress. That, too, is extremely corrupting.

There is much work to be done. In my lifetime, I never thought I would see the situation of the Supreme Court majority of five fail to understand the core principles on which our Nation was founded, grotesquely politicizing the Court, becoming an activist for the powerful rather than for the people. We must reclaim our core institutions. We must reclaim the ability to have balance of power between our three branches of government. We must reclaim transparency. We must reclaim our Nation with this beautiful, revolutionary concept of a nation of, by, and for the people rather than of, by, and for the powerful.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

TITLE IX AND VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I come to the floor to mark a milestone in the fight for gender equity in America.

Forty-four years ago, a committed group of people fought and made huge strides in the battle to equalize opportunities for women in education. They passed title IX.

Many people across the country think the sole purpose of title IX was to revolutionize women's athletics, but title IX does so much more. Title IX provided new opportunities for women who for too long faced discrimination, disparagement, and quotas in our education system.

We owe so much of the progress we have made in the past 44 years since the passage of title IX to my good friend Congresswoman Patsy T. Mink. Patsy was a woman perennially ahead of her time.

Gender discrimination in our education system was not an abstract issue for Patsy. She felt the weight of it personally. Patsy dreamed of becoming a doctor, but her dream of becoming a doctor was shattered when she tried to get into medical school and was told their quota for women had already been filled. Years later, a quota prevented her daughter Wendy from enrolling at Stanford University.

These experiences fueled Patsy's fight for gender equity. Even in the face of overwhelming odds on the way, Patsy's determination resulted in the passage of title IX. Upon Patsy's death, title IX was renamed the Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act. The fruits of Patsy's efforts are plain for everyone to see.

Last year, we came together as a nation to cheer on the U.S. women's national soccer team as they won the

Women's World Cup. This was the women's third world title. In fact, in their 31-year history, they have not placed lower than third in the World Cup.

Much of the team's success can be attributed to the impact of title IX. Title IX's implementation means that schools have to give girls equal opportunity to play sports, and this opened the door to a new generation of girls who grew up on soccer fields and went on to represent our country on the U.S. Women's National Team, including Hawaii's own Natasha Kai, who became a breakout soccer star, playing for Kahuku High School and the University of Hawaii. Natasha went on to become part of the 2008 U.S. women's soccer team at the Beijing Olympics, and they brought home a Gold Medal.

While Natasha and the Women's National Team are examples of success thanks to title IX, they also remind us that our work is not done. After years of getting paid less than their male counterparts even though they were more successful, five members of the Women's National Team filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission alleging wage discrimination. Earlier this year, this Senate unanimously passed a resolution supporting their fight for equal pay.

Of course, the fight for equal pay and equal rights is not limited to women in sports; it extends to women in all fields. This month, I am introducing two new bills that build on Patsy's work to further improve gender equity.

The Equity in Career and Technical Education Act would give schools more resources to close equity gaps in career and technical education. It also provides support to students interested in nontraditional career paths.

The second bill, the Gender Equality Educational Act, would increase training and grants to help States, school districts, and institutions of higher learning implement programs and policies to reduce sex discrimination and comply with title IX requirements. This bill also includes nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Science, technology, engineering, and math, or STEM, is one area where gender equity improvements need to be made, especially in light of the fact that there will be a need in our country for millions of workers with STEM backgrounds.

In March, I read an op-ed from Hope Jahren, a geobiology professor at the University of Hawaii. She wrote in the New York Times about the pervasive challenges women face in education and the workplace, particularly in the STEM fields. She painted a very disturbing picture of how widespread harassment and other barriers discourage young women from pursuing STEM careers.

Women are much more likely than men to switch out of STEM majors in college and leave the STEM workforce. Moreover, many girls drop out of STEM pursuits long before they ever get to college. The many reasons for women abandoning STEM pursuits include negative stereotypes about women in STEM, perceived gender barriers, feelings of isolation in their jobs, and the lack of role models and mentors.

These challenges are only compounded for women of color. Asian American and Pacific Islander women often report facing bullying, sexual harassment, and discrimination in educational settings because of language issues, cultural stereotypes, and even immigration status.

I have introduced two bills to combat these systemic barriers. These bills seek to improve outreach and success of women and minorities at all stages of the STEM pursuits. We need to keep women in the STEM pipeline if we are going to come up with the millions of workers we need with STEM backgrounds in our country to keep us competitive.

Title IX has been life-changing for millions of girls and women for 44 years. Passing this law was a landmark achievement. It is a strong foundation that we must continue to build upon.

I would like to close this morning by turning to another seminal law—the Voting Rights Act—that made real for millions of Americans their fundamental right to vote. Saturday is the third anniversary of the Supreme Court's devastating and disastrous ruling in Shelby County. In a 5-to-4 decision, that case essentially gutted the Voting Rights Act and made it easier for States to make voting harder. At least 13 States have done just that.

Alabama passed a law that would require voters to show a photo ID. The State then kept 31 driver's license offices in predominantly African-American communities open just 1 day a month—1 day a month—for people to get their IDs. The city of Athens, GA, has proposed closing nearly 12 polling places, replacing them with only two early-voting centers, both of which would be located in police headquarters. Intimidating? I would say so. These are just a few examples of laws that, in effect, make it harder to vote.

So our work is not done. Three years after the Shelby decision and the ensuing laws passed by too many States to limit voting, we in Congress must enact laws that recognize beyond a shadow of a doubt that voting is a fundamental right of a free nation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:07 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair and reassembled at 1:14 p.m. when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. SASSE).

COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

MOTION TO RECOMMIT WITHDRAWN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I withdraw my motion to recommit.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is withdrawn.

MOTION TO COMMIT WITH AMENDMENT NO. 4858

Mr. MCCONNELL. I move to commit the bill to the Judiciary Committee with instructions. This is amendment No. 4858.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. MCCONNELL] moves to commit the bill to the Judiciary Committee with instructions to report back forthwith with an amendment numbered 4858.

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under ''Text of Amendments.'')

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask for the yeas and nays on my motion.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 4859

(Purpose: To authorize the Attorney General to delay or deny the transfer of firearms and explosives and issuance of Federal firearms and explosives licenses and permits to known or suspected terrorists.)

Mr. MCCONNELL. I have an amendment to the instructions, amendment No. 4859.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. MCCONNELL], for Mr. JOHNSON, proposes an amendment numbered 4859 to the instructions of the motion to commit H.R. 2578.

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

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

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under ''Text of Amendments.'')

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask for the yeas and nays on the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 4860 TO AMENDMENT NO. 4859

Mr. MCCONNELL. I have a second-degree amendment at the desk, No. 4860.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. MCCONNELL] proposes an amendment numbered 4860 to amendment No. 4859.

The amendment is as follows: