

tax, which went back into place on January 1.

As we again discuss the policy priorities that were left unaddressed in 2017, I strongly urge my colleagues to work with me to quickly and meaningfully address the medical device tax. This would allow these innovative companies to make the long-term investments that not only lead to life-changing technologies but support thousands of high-paying jobs across the country, including in my home State of Indiana.

Another issue that has garnered bipartisan support is a healthcare program that covers millions of our children. We must reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program—also known as CHIP—that expired in September.

I have long supported the CHIP program. It provides health coverage for millions of kids, including nearly 115,000 children from Indiana. I am not alone in my support for this program. The fact is, CHIP has had strong bipartisan support for the past 20 years, and Democrats and Republicans in both the Senate and the House have shown they support a 5-year reauthorization of the program. That gives States the certainty they need to plan their budgets and provide high-quality care to these children.

Despite this shared commitment for the program and agreement on the need for a long-term reauthorization, we were only able to fund the program through March before Congress departed for the holidays. This short-term extension bought some time, but according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services—CMS—some States will start running out of money after January 19. This means families and States will very soon face the harmful consequences of congressional inaction.

Just last week, the Congressional Budget Office said that funding the CHIP program for the next 5 years will cost significantly less than previous estimates. This program is vital to our families and vital to our children. We should reauthorize the CHIP program right away.

Like the CHIP program, community health centers have enjoyed long bipartisan support for the high-quality care they provide to our families. Also, like CHIP, the funding for community health centers expired on September 30, leaving many health centers across Indiana worried about if they will have the resources they need to continue to serve Hoosiers.

We have the ability to work together now to ensure that our community health centers can continue to provide cost-effective, high-quality healthcare to people all across the country.

Finally, we have demonstrated a common desire to address the needs of the opioid and drug abuse crisis. It is a scourge. It took the lives of 63,000 people just in 2016—63,000 of our brothers and sisters, our husbands and wives, our sons and daughters. It is a heart-

break that is crushing the entire country.

I welcomed President Trump's declaration of a public health emergency, and both Republican and Democratic Senators have highlighted the need for Congress to do even more to help those struggling with addiction.

Like many other States, the opioid epidemic has been particularly devastating in underserved areas in Indiana that lack adequate treatment providers.

Senator MURKOWSKI and I have partnered on a bipartisan bill that would encourage addiction treatment professionals to serve in underserved areas by making addiction treatment facilities eligible for National Health Service Corps student loan repayment and forgiveness.

We can show our commitment to increasing access to treatment by reauthorizing the National Health Service Corps program, which expired in September. We also must recognize that a meaningful response to the opioid crisis will require robust and meaningful funding to help our communities as soon as possible.

I have often said that most people think Congress can do something to help make life better—to provide working parents with the peace of mind that their children can grow up healthy and to instill confidence in our communities so that they will have the tools they need to respond to this heart-breaking crisis. At the very least, Congress should not make this situation worse.

By failing to take action in 2017, medical device companies are once again paying a counterproductive tax that inhibits growth in Indiana.

On all of these issues—medical device taxes, our families and our children and this opioid crisis, community health centers—we can work together as Democrats, as Republicans, but more than either of those, as Americans to make sure that our families can get decent healthcare, to make sure that no one else dies because of this terrible opioid scourge we are dealing with. These are critically important issues. These are issues that know no political party, that know no special agenda. What we do know is that we need this Congress, this Senate, to deal with them now.

Mr. President, I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JOHNSON). The Senator from North Dakota.

CONGRATULATING THE NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY BISON FOOTBALL TEAM FOR WINNING THE FCS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I will be submitting a resolution in the U.S. Senate honoring the North Dakota State University Bison football team, who just won their sixth national championship in 7 years.

Mr. President, I know you are a football fan, so you can truly appreciate what a fantastic achievement that is. What NDSU has accomplished over the

last 7 seasons is absolutely extraordinary. With our victory on Saturday, the Bison have now won six national football championship series division I national titles in 7 years. That ties them for the most of all time. Also, in each of the past 7 years, they have won or shared the top spot in the Missouri Valley Football Conference championship.

We also want to congratulate the James Madison University Dukes on an outstanding year. We had five championships in a row. The Dukes managed to beat us last year in a semifinal game, and we came back and avenged that loss in a thrilling championship game in Frisco, TX. It went down to the final play. It was a very, very exciting game.

Winning a national championship is not easy, and this success, reflected both on and off the field, is earned through hard work and dedication. We recognize and congratulate all of the incredible players and Coach Klieman and his tremendous coaching staff, who put in countless hours of practice and preparation.

We also recognize the importance of good leadership from athletic director Matt Larsen, NDSU president Dean Bresciani, and everyone at NDSU, all the coaches and the staff, team members, and really everybody who is part of Bison Nation. North Dakotans travel with our team. They show up in Bison Nation, and their cheering and supporting our great team is a huge part of our incredible victories.

We congratulate Easton Stick, the quarterback, for achieving MVP honors and leading a tremendous offensive effort by the Bison and also Nick DeLuca, middle linebacker, for leading an incredible defensive effort. These were two tremendous defenses—James Madison and North Dakota State Bison—fast, strong, and it was a thrilling game and fun to watch.

I want to compliment James Madison not only on their program but on all their fans and supporters—a real class act. I am very impressed with James Madison University—their students, their team, and all of their alumni, who also turned out in force for what was a tremendous game in Frisco, TX.

With that, I submit this resolution to the U.S. Senate honoring the North Dakota State Bison.

Mr. President, I have just one other thing to say: Go Bison.

With that, I yield the floor.

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

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

**AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION  
CONVENTION AND NAFTA**

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I was fortunate enough this week to attend the American Farm Bureau Federation's annual convention in Nashville, where I had the opportunity to headline a discussion of the farm bill, along with my colleague from Kansas on the

Senate Ag Committee and the gentleman from Texas, Congressman CONAWAY, who is leading on the House Agriculture Committee, during the President's commodity meeting. The American Farm Bureau hosted other farm groups and commodity organizations from across the country to talk about the next farm bill and to try to bring consensus as to what agriculture is looking for in farm policy.

In my opportunity to visit with people at the Farm Bureau's annual meeting, in my remarks, I paid particular attention to the farm bill. It is a farm safety net. When we talk about a farm bill, I suppose we ought to highlight that only a small portion of the farm bill is actually related to farm programs. There are a number of titles to the farm bill, and most of the money in a farm bill is spent on nutrition programs and mostly SNAP, but there are other important components of a farm bill—rural development and conservation. In addition to that topic, which I have been on the Senate floor speaking about before, are food aid and support for those who are experiencing famine around the globe. My opportunity to be with farmers and ranchers from across the country gave me an opportunity to not only speak about my views as to what a farm bill should contain but, more importantly, for me to hear what they had to say that was important to them.

Farm Bureau members from across the country made it clear to me, first of all, that they would like to see Congress—Republicans and Democrats in the House and the Senate—and the administration work together in a bipartisan fashion to get a farm bill done and, prior to that, to get a disaster relief bill completed, which I hope we will do yet this month on the Senate floor—both the disaster bill that needs to get to the President's desk as soon as possible and also a farm bill that needs to be completed in a timely fashion. The current farm bill under which we are operating expires in 2018.

Of the things I want to highlight that I heard from Farm Bureau members while I was there is certainly the importance of crop insurance and the value it provides, particularly for those of us who live and farm and work in places where the weather is not often our friend, as well as just the challenges the current farm bill is creating in Kansas.

Particularly, the safety net programs PLC and ARC don't work as well as they should or could. Part of that has to do with timeliness, and part is the inability and the difficulty in farmers having to choose between two programs and to predict for a long period—the life of the farm bill—which makes the most sense to them economically. Whether they are going to have high prices, low prices, good weather, or bad weather is a hard thing to know in the life of a farm bill. Again, because of the issues we have with the current farm bill, timeliness

is important because those provisions that are less than satisfactory today will be extended if we aren't successful in completing a farm bill this year.

While the topic of conversation generally revolved around the farm bill, I want to indicate to my colleagues that so much of what I heard was about trade, particularly about NAFTA. The reality is, 98 to 99 percent of the mouths to feed are outside of the United States. Farmers and ranchers earn their livings by feeding a hungry world, and exports matter to us. There was a lot of concern expressed to me and among the farmers and ranchers who were gathered there about the potential of the withdrawal by the United States from NAFTA. Kansas is a good example. Our largest importer—the place to which we export the most agricultural commodities—is Mexico.

It is not just about commodities. In addition to the commodities, there are manufacturing jobs related to food and food products. There are 36,000 jobs that generate more than \$5.7 billion in economic activity, and approximately 14 percent of all jobs and 10 percent of all manufacturing jobs are tied to the food and agricultural sectors. So, when we talk about trade and exports, we are not just talking about shipping a ton of wheat or a carload of wheat to another country; we are also talking about all of the jobs here in the United States. It is not just in growing commodities and not just in raising cattle but all of the jobs that come from taking those commodities, turning them into food, and exporting the food to other countries as well.

I have had this conversation with people within the administration and with my colleagues in the U.S. Senate. I do believe the tax bill we passed will improve the economy and that farmers, lots of other business men and women, manufacturers, and others will experience greater economic opportunity as a result of the passage of the tax bill. I would highlight that the tax rates are a lot less important if we don't have income. If something would happen in which we would not be exporting—for example, if there would be a withdrawal from NAFTA—the outcome could be that the tax rates would become semi-irrelevant because the income levels of farmers and ranchers and those who would have jobs in the food sector would be significantly diminished. Less income means tax rates don't matter as much as they otherwise would.

Things are really difficult in agriculture today. Commodity prices are at low prices historically. The challenges are great. Weather, as I said earlier when speaking about crop insurance, is not always our friend. Across Kansas, the plea is for rain or snowfall or moisture. It is dry statewide. The challenges the producers in my State but really those across the country face are low commodity prices and weather, which are significant. What that means is, we need every additional market.

We cannot afford to lose any market to which we sell those commodities. More markets mean higher prices, and more demand means higher prices. Today, we need every penny we can gain on a bushel of corn or wheat or soybeans or grain sorghum. We need to make certain we don't lose markets but that we gain markets.

I commend the President for traveling to Nashville and speaking and meeting with the American Farm Bureau. I believe it has been 30-plus years since a President attended a Farm Bureau annual convention. I know, in my own experience both in the House and the Senate, reporters have often asked me to analyze what I have heard or haven't heard in a President's State of the Union Address. It has always been my practice to listen to a State of the Union Address and hear whether a President speaks about agriculture, about farmers, about ranchers, about rural America. Here we had a President who traveled to Nashville and spent time with those farmers and ranchers of America, and I am pleased the President did so.

I continue to encourage the administration to remain mindful of the role agricultural trade plays in our economy. I would indicate that our withdrawal from NAFTA is a high-risk strategy—a negotiating tactic, perhaps. It is true we have the highest quality of agriculture products available in the world, but other countries are very interested in taking our markets, and any indication that our markets are not going to continue gives countries like Argentina, Brazil, and others the opportunity to make the case that they will be stable suppliers. The things we raise in the United States they can sell and provide in those countries as well. My point is, we don't have a corner on the market, and any suggestion that we are not a stable supplier or that the trading relationship is going to diminish or disappear between two countries means that others are eagerly seeking to take those markets away from us.

Given the impact on our Nation's economy, I urge those conference attendees, those people I visited with in Nashville, to continue to convey to all of those policymakers the importance of trade and the importance of trade agreements.

The administration has a desire to develop bilateral as compared to multilateral trade agreements, and I encourage those negotiations to be ongoing today. We don't have any time to waste when it comes to finding new markets and trading relationships with other countries.

Again, I appreciate the President traveling to Nashville and spending time with farmers and ranchers, and I appreciate the agenda he outlined in regard to regulatory relief, as well as the issue of broadband, on which the President spent a significant amount of time, providing technology to a part of

the country that has, in many instances, been lacking or woefully inadequate.

But the bottom line is that rural America needs income. We can do lots of things to improve the quality of life in rural America, but in the absence of farmer success, in the absence of a farmer and rancher earning a living, the ability to attract our children or others to come back to the farm and the ability to retain our young people in the community to work on a farm diminishes greatly.

One of the questions I received was from a young lady studying in Texas, and this was her question: What are you doing to make certain that young people have a chance to be farmers? While my answer was less than perfect—it is a hard one to answer—it is an important question. The reality is that the chances of young people having the opportunity in agriculture to earn a living is totally dependent upon the economic success of those individuals in agriculture today and what the future holds. We can find a few programs that might encourage young people to be able to enter agriculture as a profession and as a career, but the reality is that it will only work when they are earning a good living, and that comes, once again, from the safety nets, including crop insurance, which will be included in a farm bill as it works its way through Congress this year, but also in the opportunity to see that every market around the globe is available to the U.S. farmer and rancher so that he and she will earn a living and so that they will increase the chances that their sons and daughters have the opportunity to work side by side with them into the future.

I especially want to thank a few people from the American Farm Bureau Federation for allowing me to attend and inviting me to attend and to speak—certainly, President Zippy Duvall, the president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, from Georgia; Dale Moore, a Kansan who is at the American Farm Bureau Federation; and Mary Kay Thatcher, their long-time government affairs person. All of those individuals at the American Farm Bureau Federation do their job so well, but I especially want to acknowledge the friendship and support of those three individuals.

I am reminded that no matter where we go, farmers and ranchers have a lot in common. In addition to their economic importance to communities across Kansas and around rural America, it is farmers and ranchers that still today provide a sense of what is right in America—an understanding of right and wrong, an understanding of the value of life, integrity, character, and values. It is something that is important not just to rural America but to our entire United States of America. So thank you to the farmers who visited with me. Thank you to the farmers who gave me the opportunity to speak with them and listened to me.

Please know that I am happy and will continue to roll up my sleeves to work with my colleagues, Republicans and Democrats—the Senator from Kansas, the chairman of the Ag Committee; and the Senator from Michigan, the ranking member, Ms. STABENOW. Let's get a good farm bill done. Let's get it done on time, and let's all work together to make sure economic activity is alive and well and trade flourishes between the United States and the rest of the world.

I yield the floor.

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

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

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I believe that my distinguished colleague and friend, Senator BLUMENTHAL, will be joining me on the floor. I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak as in morning business for such time as I may require and, at the conclusion of my remarks, that Senator BLUMENTHAL be recognized to make his remarks on the same subject.

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

#### SAFEGUARDING OUR ELECTIONS

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, 2018 is going to be an election year. In just 10 months, Americans will go to the polls to exercise their franchise, believing in the integrity of our democratic process. I am here today to discuss a threat to the integrity of that process, which is getting little attention here in Congress—nothing near what it deserves. We really ought to be acting with some expedition to safeguard our elections this November. Yet, instead, the effort is one of chasing down partisan investigative rabbit holes.

What ought to be our job? Well, national security, intelligence, election, and law enforcement officials, many of them testifying before us here in Congress, have made what our job is very clear. We must counter Russia's well-established election interference playbook. Russia will hack. Russia will bully. Russia will propagandize. Perhaps more insidiously, Russia will seek to corrupt, particularly by exploiting cracks in our incorporation and campaign finance laws. We are warned: Russia will seek to interfere in 2018's election.

I ask unanimous consent that an article entitled "CIA's Pompeo says Russia and others trying to undermine U.S. elections" be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

To quote the Center for Strategic and International Studies' Heather Conley, testifying before Congress last spring, corruption is the "lubricant" for Mos-

cow's election interference, so "the battle of Western democracies to defeat corruption" must be seen as "a matter of national security."

Testifying before our Crime and Terrorism Subcommittee, former Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, agreed, saying of Russia's 2016 election meddling:

I believe [the Russians] are now emboldened to continue such activities in the future, both here and around world, and to do so even more intensely. If there has ever been a clarion call for vigilance and action against a threat to the very foundation of our democratic political system, this episode is it. I hope the American people recognize the severity of this threat and that we collectively counter it before it further erodes the fabric of our democracy.

How to counter it? Well, there are two important solutions that witnesses have identified in recent testimony before the Judiciary and other committees here in the Senate.

First, guard against the use of phony shell corporations as facilitators of corruption. Ms. Conley, as I said, wrote that corruption is the "lubricant" with which the Russians operate their interference schemes. She and her colleagues warn that to fight the corruption that gives Russia this channel of influence—and I quote her here—"enhancing transparency and the effectiveness of the Western democratic tools, instruments, and institutions is critical." One central way to cut off this channel of improper influence would be to require companies to disclose who their real owner is so that Russian influence can no longer hide behind anonymous American shell companies.

Another would be to crack down on the dark money that is flooding into American elections. It is illegal for foreign nationals to spend money or participate at all in American elections. Yet, post-Citizens United, the same dark money avenues that allow domestic election interference—for instance, that the Koch brothers use to manipulate American elections—are right out there to be used by Vladimir Putin. If they can hide their identity behind 501(c)(4)s and other dark money channels, so can operatives for the Russians.

Instead of taking up these important measures or even ensuring a thorough investigation into the 2016 election meddling, we are—to paraphrase the legendary Senator Sam Ervin of Watergate fame—chasing rabbits when we should be on a bear hunt.

Let's look at a few rabbits that have distracted us from the task at hand. Remember, when Michael Flynn, the President's former National Security Adviser, illicitly communicated with the Russian Ambassador about sanctions during the transition. Then in the White House, he lied to the FBI about it, which concerned the Justice Department so badly that the Acting Attorney General warned the White House Counsel personally, after which she was fired, but the President then