

During her confirmation hearing, Mrs. McMahon demonstrated little knowledge of public education or the basic programs and functions of the Department of Education. Clearly, the choice of this nominee is not based on merit.

But that does not matter because Mrs. McMahon was selected to be a front, as the Agency she hopes to lead is being dismantled by Elon Musk and DOGE. Indeed, while Mrs. McMahon was at her confirmation hearing, claiming that she would work to improve the Department of Education, Elon Musk's DOGE minions were at work firing people, taking back grants, compromising sensitive data, and laying the groundwork to eliminate the entire Agency.

And on Valentine's Day, President Trump's Department of Education threatened to cut Federal funding from public schools, as well as colleges and universities, if they did not eliminate any program that the Trump administration deems as promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

During her confirmation hearing, Mrs. McMahon seemed unsure whether this edict meant that schools can't celebrate or teach classes on African-American history or host clubs like Special Olympics or Girls Who Code.

As a reminder, by law, the Secretary of Education may not interfere with the content that schools teach, nor the academic standards that they set. Mrs. McMahon doesn't seem to know that.

By the way, while Mr. Musk has been tearing the Department of Education apart from the inside, Republicans in Congress have passed punitive blueprints that will cut trillions from government services to the American people, including education, all to pay for tax cuts for the richest Americans and Big Business.

In the Senate, the Republicans are calling for an unspecified \$9 trillion in cuts. In the House, the Education and Workforce Committee must provide a minimum of \$330 billion in cuts from education and job training programs. It is no wonder that educators, students, and families from across the country feel under siege.

We know what this looks like because we see how teachers, students, and military families are reacting with dismay as our world-class Department of Defense schools are laboring under another Secretary intent on politicizing its Department and promoting an indoctrination agenda authorized by President Trump.

I would like to take a moment to first thank all educators, school staff, family volunteers, and all community members who tirelessly work to equip our students for the future. We owe you a debt of gratitude and so much more than that. We need to recommit to strengthening our public schools and to investing in them.

In the first part of the 20th century, it was the high school movement that broadly expanded educational attain-

ment, preparing young Americans for success in a changing world and evolving economy. This movement featured professional educators and engaged families and communities. It was about general knowledge and practical application.

This movement launched the United States as a world economic power. It was essential to our national defense, and it created the conditions for the success of the largest expansion of postsecondary education through the GI bill. The high school movement meant that soldiers returning from World War II already had high school diplomas and were ready for postsecondary education.

Head Start, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Higher Education Act are some of our Federal laws that work to ensure that opportunities to learn and advance are not limited by income, race, ethnicity, or disability.

The expansion of public education is a great American story. Yet, today, it sometimes seems to have been forgotten. Some argue that we do not need public schools, that we can offer vouchers or education savings accounts or homeschooling instead. Today, instead of freedom of inquiry and inclusion, we see policing of what schools can teach, what students can read, what they can discuss, and how they should think. This is a recipe for stifling creativity and the development of the skills needed for an ever-changing knowledge economy.

We politicize and neglect public schools at our peril. They educate nearly 50 million students—our future. It is time that we treat public education as the priority it must be if we want a brighter future for our children and our grandchildren and our country.

We should embark on a new public school movement—one that will strengthen and support the education profession, one that will ensure that all communities can provide modern, state-of-the-art facilities, one that will ensure that all students have the right to read—with evidence-based reading instruction, school libraries, books at home, diverse materials, and the freedom to choose what to read.

Today, we are failing our public schools because we are not investing in them. For example, the average age of our public school facilities is 49 years. The GAO found that over half of our school districts in our country needed to replace or update major systems in more than half of their buildings.

As a nation, we should commit to modernizing our school facilities. That is why I will be reintroducing the Rebuild America's Schools Act to invest \$130 billion in our school facilities in the communities with the greatest need.

We know there is a crisis in the education profession. Too many school districts struggle to hire and retain teach-

ers. Too often, a career in teaching means financial struggles and little support to meet student needs.

Additionally, we need a national focus on literacy. In 2024, the percentage of eighth graders reading below the basic level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress was the largest in the assessment's history, and the percentage of fourth graders who scored below the basic level was the largest in 20 years.

Adults are not doing any better. Recent results of the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies show that overall scores in literacy and numeracy have decreased for U.S. adults, with adults scoring at the lowest level of proficiency in literacy, increasing from 19 percent in 2017 to 28 percent in 2023.

This is a crisis. Eliminating the Department of Education does nothing to solve it. Instead of gutting educational funding and eliminating the Department of Education to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy, Congress should address the acute literacy crisis for both adults and children across the Nation.

We should be increasing funding for adult education—at least doubling it. We should increase resources for schools to provide evidence-based reading instruction by fully funding title I, increasing funding for the Comprehensive Literacy Development State Grant Program and for Innovative Approaches to Literacy grants.

We should double the Pell grant and restore its purchasing power so students do not have to rely mostly on loans to pay for college.

Sadly, none of this is on Mrs. McMahon's agenda.

I urge my colleagues to join me in ushering in a new public education movement—a movement to ensure that this generation, as well as future ones, has the foundation to achieve their full potential and build a prosperous future. This nominee is not the person to lead such an effort. All indications are that she will actively work against it. So I encourage my colleagues to vote no on her confirmation.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 348

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise today to seek unanimous consent for my STABLE Trade Policy Act with Senator Kaine, an act that would prevent any President from imposing tariffs on a U.S. ally or a free-trade agreement partner without congressional consent.

I will make that motion in just a moment, but let me, first, just explain what this is and why I am doing it.

Next week, President Trump has announced plans to impose 25-percent tariffs on products coming into the United States from Mexico and Canada, our No. 1 and No. 2 trading partners.

These tariffs will be disastrous for our economy and our national security. These tariffs will cost the average American household about \$1,200 a year. They will raise costs for avocados, appliances, diesel fuel, dog toys, car parts, Christmas tree lights, tomatoes, and tequila. I could go on.

Our economies are so closely integrated—the United States, Canada, and Mexico—that it will increase the cost of a GM pickup truck about \$10,000.

Even if these tariffs, at the last minute, are delayed, businesses are hurt by the uncertainty, which continues to increase costs.

President Trump plans to follow those tariffs with reciprocal tariffs on the EU, which includes many of our critical NATO allies and closest partners.

Imposing tariffs on our allies and partners diminishes our standing in the world and makes our neighbors less likely to help us in the future.

It is no surprise that Americans think this is a terrible idea. Barely a quarter of Americans think imposing tariffs on Canada is a good idea. More than double that disapprove.

President Trump has already declared an economic emergency to justify imposing these tariffs on Mexico and Canada, but my bill with Senator KAINE would prevent him from abusing long-established national security authorities to follow through on further tariff threats against our allies and FTA partners.

The U.S. Constitution in the Commerce Clause, article I, section 8, gives Congress jurisdiction over trade policy. It is time that we take ownership back of controlling the ability to impose tariffs willy-nilly on our trusted partners and allies by passing this bill and reining in President Trump's costly and damaging ideas.

So I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Finance be discharged from further consideration of S. 348 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I rise to discuss some issues with Senator COONS' request for unanimous consent for the Senate to pass S. 348, the STABLE Trade Policy Act.

Senator COONS is a good friend and a great ally, and, reluctantly, I stand to

oppose this motion on this particular procedure.

First, Senator COONS and I agree about much on trade policy, including the need for the United States to have more high-standard free-trade agreements, like the United States-Mexico-Canada trade agreement, or USMCA. We should ensure that the commitments in those agreements are respected.

The last administration not only refused to negotiate new trade agreements but undermined U.S. rights under them when it waived our intellectual property rights under the WTO TRIPS Agreement and without informing Congress, attempting to remove the rights of American investors under the USMCA.

Second, I also agree that we should not undertake tariff actions lightly on our allies or free-trade agreement partners.

We should, however, take care before we say that all options are completely off the table. In fact, all of our free-trade agreements provide exceptions for when parties can remove economic benefits, including on national security grounds.

I don't recall anyone suggesting that the Biden administration could not impose sanctions on Nicaragua last year because it was a CAFTA party. Instead, we recognized that legitimate national security grounds, including Nicaragua's human rights abuses, warranted the economic pressure.

Third, it was only yesterday that we confirmed Jamieson Greer as the U.S. Trade Representative to serve as the principal adviser on trade issues. He told the Finance Committee that he wants to work closely with Congress.

There are a lot of good things we can do together. For instance, we can negotiate new agreements and reinvigorate congressional executive partnerships on trade.

The STABLE Trade Policy Act is, accordingly, too blunt of an instrument when nuance is called for, including the option of tariffs in some instances.

With that, I object to Senator COONS' request.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BUDD). The objection is heard.

The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I understand that Senator CRAPO, the chairman of the Finance Committee, a supporter of President Trump, has blocked this bill today. I hope to find ways to work with him on improving market access and on elevating the quality and the capabilities of U.S. trade engagement with our partners. But I really don't understand why President Trump seems so intent on harming one of his signature accomplishments, the USMCA.

I am disappointed because Congress gave the President authority to impose tariffs in the event of a national security crisis. Congress did not grant this power to pursue petty grudges against trusted neighbors.

Honestly, how can anyone be angry with Canadians? They are the nicest people in the world. Yet here they are, working with us, pleading with us to not impose ruinous tariffs that would harm their economy and ours.

I will briefly, then, just make, again, a few simple points. I am disappointed that President Trump isn't doing more to reduce costs. He was elected, in no small part, because of high inflation and promised it would come down on day one.

These tariffs, if imposed, will make inflation worse and hit the lowest income Americans the hardest. It will impact American business, American families, and American communities.

So I hope that working together with my friends and colleagues here in the Senate, we can find ways to lower costs on pharmaceuticals and automobiles and microchips. But imposing reciprocal tariffs on trusted friends and allies and sparking tariff wars in our region and around the world is not the way to do that.

Two-thirds of Americans already think that President Trump isn't doing enough to lower costs. Blocking this bill will only accelerate that if President Trump continues to act unwisely and bully and threaten our closest and most trusted partners.

We must find a better way forward together.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UKRAINE

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize a very painful milestone. This week marks the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Over the past 3 years, the world has witnessed the incredible bravery and resolve of the Ukrainian people as they have stood up to Russia's unspeakable brutality and destruction.

We have seen—and, indeed, the United States should take great pride in having led—an impressive coalition of nations coming together to support Ukraine in this fight to preserve its democracy.

At the same time, an alarming convergence of authoritarian states—Russia, China, Iran, Belarus, and North Korea—have banded together to enable Russia's illegal war of choice.

As we mark this milestone, we are faced with another frightening set of developments. President Trump has set his sights on negotiations with Vladimir Putin to win the war. But before reaching the negotiating table, Mr. Trump has appeared so eager to reach