

not books? I have one simple answer for that, which is get a library card. Our libraries in Ohio and around the country are all into this effort. They have all rallied behind it, and they are all eager to be a part of this.

My wife Jane and I made it a priority to read to our kids when they were growing up, and a lot of that came from books we took out of the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Libraries. It also had the consequence of introducing our kids to the libraries and helped them to become lifelong readers and learners. That is one way for those who are wondering how to begin. Get a library card, go to your library, and get started there.

I am proud Ohio has led the way in this effort. This campaign began in Cincinnati and is now becoming a national movement.

We do talk a lot in this body about education. On a bipartisan basis, we recently passed legislation that had to do with K-12 education reform. I think it was an important step, but one thing it did is it returned more power back to the States and back to our families, which I think is a good thing.

The new law also authorized grant funding for State comprehensive literacy plans, including targeted grants for early childhood education programs—what we are talking about here, early childhood. It made sure those grants are prioritized for areas with disproportionate numbers of low-income families. We also authorized professional development opportunities for teachers, literacy coaches, literacy specialists, and English as a Second Language specialists. These grants will be helpful in empowering our teachers to do their part to help our young people to learn to read. Clearly, our wonderful teachers have a role to play.

To my colleagues, while this is all fine, there is no substitute for the family. There is no substitute for what can happen in a family before the child even goes to school and then while the child is starting school to be able to give that child the advantage of being able to learn more easily. Although I supported that legislation—there are some good things in there—let's not forget the fundamental role all of us play as parents or aunts or uncles or grandparents or other caregivers.

Washington may be the only place on Earth where 30 million words—which is this word gap we talked about, which is less than the length of our Tax Code and regulations—doesn't sound like a lot, but it is a lot, and there is no government substitute to close that 30 million word gap. Ultimately, it is going to be closed by parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, other caregivers, and brothers and sisters with the help of librarians, teachers, and others. We need to call attention to this issue to let parents know that this 15 minutes a day can make a huge difference. Every little bit counts. Every time you read to the child, you are giving him or her an educational advan-

tage, you are making it easier for them to learn, helping to instill in them a love of learning that will last a lifetime.

Again, I thank the Read Aloud campaign. I am proud of their roots in my hometown and in Ohio. I thank them for all they are doing every day for our kids and for our future.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I wish to continue sharing some information about Monsanto and the Deny Americans the Right to Know Act that is on the Senate floor being debated right now.

The reason I want to turn to this is this is such an egregious overreach of the Federal Government, stripping States of the right to respond to their citizens' desire for clear information, consumer-friendly information, on GE—genetically engineered—ingredients and stripping American citizens of the right to know.

I have already gone through a number of the points that are important in this debate; that if you are going to eliminate the ability of States to provide consumer-friendly information on their label—which can be as simple as a tiny symbol or a letter such as Brazil uses—then there has to be a national standard that provides consumer-friendly information. Certainly, the hall of mirrors embedded in the DARK Act, which says consumers have to call call centers somewhere around the world and maybe they will eventually get an answer to their question about GE ingredients or they have to own a smartphone and have a data plan and take a picture of a computer code and give up some of their privacy in the process in order to try to find out this information or they have to guess where on social media the company has posted some information about the ingredients they have in their product—those three sets of components are completely unworkable, 100 percent unworkable.

Ask yourself if that would be a logical remedy to people trying to find out about the calories in a product. Instead of finding out in one second, it could take them 10 minutes or, for that matter, an hour or they may never even get an answer on the end of that call center because the call center is too busy.

The point is that 9 out of 10 Americans believe this information should be easily available on the label. I went through those numbers before. The numbers are basically the same for Republicans, basically the same for Democrats and Independents—slight variations. Throughout the ideological spectrum, this is something American citizens agree on. Along comes the Monsanto DARK Act and its proponents to say: We don't care that the American people have finally found something to agree on that goes to their core values about the right to

know. We are going to stomp out their right to know because we simply don't work for the American people. We don't work for our constituents. We work for some powerful special interest.

That is wrong. I hope the American citizens will let their Senators know it is wrong. They are certainly letting me know how they feel, and I thought I would share some of those with you, but before I do that, I had some inquiries about this situation of basically all citizens throughout the ideological spectrum sharing this same point of view—9 out of 10. Is it also true for gender and age? Let me share that. Specifically, there was a followup question which asked: Does a barcode work to provide information on the label or do you want a physical label stating that there are GE ingredients? Physical label versus this barcode—which people don't even know where it is on the package.

It turns out again it is 90 percent. It is 88 percent of Democrats, 88 percent of Republicans, and 90 percent of Independents say: No, we want the physical label, not some mysterious label that we have to use our smartphone to interpret and give up some of our privacy.

How about men and women—87 percent of men, 97 percent of women.

How about younger and older—those who are less than 50 years old, 86 percent; those who are over 50 years old, 90 percent. Again, basically 9 out of 10 Americans, regardless of gender, regardless of age, regardless of ideology, say: No, this is a fundamental issue of American freedom, my freedom to exercise my choices based on basic information that should be on the label.

Let's turn to some real constituents and some real letters so we are not just talking numbers.

Bertha from Springfield writes:

I urge you to vote against SB 2609 concerning labeling of foods that contain GMOs. Every American has the right to know what they are putting in their bodies. You were elected to represent all Oregonians and protect our rights, be assured I will check yours and every other representatives' voting records before I cast my votes in the future.

Let's turn to Eli from Medford, OR:

I want to hear you come out publicly against S. 2609. Please lead the fight to get GMOs clearly labeled without delay.

Well, Eli, that is exactly what I am doing. I hadn't read your letter before I started speaking out strongly because I fundamentally believe we are here to represent our citizens—not to bow down to special interests—and this is as clear as it gets. This is as straightforward as it could possibly be.

Let's turn to Ms. JC in Salem, OR:

Please, I am requesting you NOT to support (S. 2609) (referred by some as the Dark Act) when it comes up for a vote in the Senate. I know the Senate Agricultural Committee voted 14-6 to pass the Dark Act S. 2609 last week. I believe the government should protect OUR RIGHT TO KNOW what's in our food. Please DO NOT VOTE to block GMO labeling.

She goes on:

Most European nations do not allow these types of food to be grown or sold in their countries. This should give you some information about how people in other countries view genetically modified foods.

Please do not support this legislation. Your constituents will appreciate your support for their right to know what's in the foods we put on our plates to feed to our families.

That is a very personal issue: what you are putting in your mouth, what you are putting on your family's table for your partner and your children. That is a very powerful issue, and here we have Senators who do not care and want to take away that right for something so close to people's hearts.

Let's turn to Sheila in Pendleton, OR:

I want to urge Senator MERKLEY to vote against the S. 2609, which would block mandatory labeling of genetically engineered foods. I urge the Senator to stand up for states' rights and individual rights to know. We have a right to know what is in our food so that we can make educated decisions about the food we eat.

She continues:

The free market can only work when consumers have the information they need to make informed choices. Contrary to what you hear from industry, GMO food labeling will not increase food prices. Companies frequently change labels for all sorts of reasons, without passing those costs on to consumers.

Let me dwell on that point for a moment. It is completely reasonable not to have 50 different State standards that are conflicting, but what is unreasonable is to say that putting simple information on the label—consumer-friendly information—costs a dime because that label is printed at the same cost whether or not it includes a symbol that says "This food contains GE ingredients." It doesn't cost any more to print the calories on the label, doesn't cost any more to put the vitamin D content, doesn't cost any more to print a symbol or a phrase or an asterisk indicating there are GE ingredients. So let's just be through with that argument that somehow there is a cost issue.

Ronald from Medford writes:

Oppose S. 2609, the anti-GMO labeling bill. Allow States to enact their own GMO labeling laws.

And that is a point—States' rights. I hear all the time from colleagues here on this floor about States' rights, that the Federal Government should treat States as a laboratory to experiment with ideas, to see if they work, to perfect ideas that might be considered for national adoption. And isn't that exactly what Vermont is—a State laboratory that is implementing a bill on July 1? And we could all watch and see whether it works.

On July 1, there will be no conflicting State standards because there is only one State involved—Vermont. So we don't have to have confusing labels going from different warehouses to different States because there is just one State putting forward a standard.

So it is an opportunity for us to view that as a laboratory and see how it works. Other States might want to copy if it works well, or they might want a different version. Then the Senate could say: You know what, now we have conflicting State standards, and let's address the core issue, which is a consumer-friendly indication on the package, and get rid of the conflicting State standards. That would be a fair and appropriate role for this Senate to play.

But to crush the only State laboratory that is about to come into existence in exchange for nothing but a hall of mirrors that does not give any reasonable opportunity for the consumer as a shopper to find out the information they need—the information they can get in 1 second by looking on the label but would instead take 10 minutes or 30 minutes or they may not even be able to get it at all while standing there in the grocery store looking at the very first product on their list.

Joshua of Eugene says:

Please support the public's right to know what food has GMO contained in it and work to defeat the DARK Act.

Additionally, I fully support also the public's right to know where their food comes from, the country of origin, as well as what nutritional content is in all food eaten in restaurants.

So he is suggesting that we should expand this conversation to restaurants. For now, let's talk about packaged foods. And he is also commenting on country of origin.

I want to live in a nation where, if I choose to buy the produce grown in America, I get to buy the produce grown in America. I want to live in a nation where, if I choose to buy the meat raised in America and support American ranchers, I get to support American ranchers. It may simply be because I want to help out my fellow countrymen. It may be because I think they have superior produce or make a superior product, a type of meat. It may just be patriotism. But it should be my right to know where that food is grown.

We have a law, country-of-origin labeling, that does exactly that because consumers want to know. It isn't about what steak to put in your mouth; it is about where the food was grown.

It so happens that we are part of a trade agreement—the World Trade Organization—that says our labeling of where pork and beef are grown is a trade impediment. I couldn't disagree more. We have lost case after case in the WTO over this topic. Finally, we had to take country-of-origin labeling off of our beef and off of our pork. We haven't had to take it off our other meats, other produce. I hope we get to the point where we can fully restore our country-of-origin labeling because it matters to Americans.

What kind of country are we when we don't even have the right to buy our fellow citizens' produce and our fellow

citizens' meat? Talk about stripping away freedom. Yet here comes a group of Senators on this floor who want to further strip the rights of consumers. No wonder American citizens are angry with their government. No wonder they are angry specifically with Congress, that they rate us so unfavorably, below 10 percent. No wonder they are cynical because of things like this, where we ignore the fundamental desires of citizens and instead cave in to a powerful special interest. That is not the way it is supposed to be in the United States of America.

Terry of Lake Oswego writes:

GMO free food is information we need to have. I need the right to decide what to eat and feed my family. If the food industry want[s] to produce foods without meeting certain standards, using whatever they want to make their product, sell foods to us, what protection do we have? Do we really know the long term effects of altered food ingredients?

Well, Terry, no, we don't know all the effects, but we do know there is a series of potential benefits and a series of problems. Those problems are the massive runoff of herbicide—which is a name for plant-killing chemicals—massive runoff of plant-killing chemicals into our streams. There are plants in our streams—algae, microorganisms—that are the fundamental basis of the food chain, and that makes a difference. We do know this herbicide is classified as a potential human carcinogen by the World Health Organization. We also know those who eat GMO food end up with more glyphosate—that is herbicide—in their body.

But it is up to you, Terry, to decide whether you have concerns about this. You should get to decide. No Senator can come to this floor, Terry, and say: I know better. I want to strip your ability to make a decision because I know everything. And you know what. I don't care about the scientific research; I just want to serve these powerful ad companies that don't want you to know. So too bad, Terry, and too bad to the 90 percent of Americans, 90 percent of Democrats, 90 percent of Republicans, 90 percent of Independents, 90 percent of women, 90 percent of men—I am rounding off but pretty close—90 percent of the young. Too bad for all of that because Senators here want to deny you the information on which to make the decision you are asking for.

Gail of Portland, OR, says:

Please do all you can to defeat S. 2609. It is my understanding that under this bill, it would be illegal for States to require GMO labeling, even though polls show that 93 percent of Americans support labeling efforts.

Well, Gail, I don't have the poll you have that says 93 percent of Americans support labeling, but I do have this poll done in November 2015 by a reputable pollster that says 89 percent. So let's take your 93 percent and let's take this poll's 89 percent and just agree that basically 9 out of 10 Americans want this information on the product. And when asked if they want it in the form of a mysterious barcode that compromises

their privacy if they use it—they don't even know why it is on the product—or they want it in terms of a simple statement or symbol, they want the simple statement or symbol.

So, Gail, thank you for your letter.

William of Chemult, OR, said:

I was distressed to learn that the Senate Agriculture Committee last week approved the voluntary GMO labeling. . . . This would be a disaster if it became law. As your constituent, I'm writing to ask you to oppose this and any other scheme that would make GMO labeling voluntary.

William, I am sorry to report that it is even worse than voluntary because an actual label is banned by this bill. A State cannot put a real label or symbol on the product. Instead, this is the anti-label bill. It says you have to put on things so the customer can't see there are GE ingredients. It has banned putting clear, simple, consumer-friendly information on the product. Instead, it proposes a wild goose chase where you have to call some call center somewhere, some 800 number somewhere and hope that you can get through the phone tree; hope that eventually they will stop saying: Because of call volume, it will be another 30 minutes before we can talk to you; hope that somehow when you get to that call center, it is not staffed by folks who speak the English language with such an accent that you don't even understand what they are saying or they do not understand what you are saying.

It is even worse, William, because they want to put a barcode on as a substitute, with no indication for the purpose of this barcode, so that it is just a mystery. Why is this there? I don't know. Does this tell you about their upcoming products? Does this tell you about advertisements for discounts if you take your smartphone and you snap on this? Because the only way that barcode has value—and every Senator in this room knows this fact—it only has value if you tell the consumer why that barcode is on the package. If it says "This product has GE ingredients. For details, scan this bar code," then that is a valuable contribution, but without that indication, this is just another wild goose chase taking customers on a crazy adventure with no real information when they could have had a symbol that in 1 second answered their question.

And, William, it gets worse. If you can believe it, it gets worse, because under this voluntary standard, what counts as a nonlabel—not only a 1-800 number or a barcode or a computer code of some sort—what also counts is putting something in social media somewhere. Well, what social media? There are a hundred different social media companies. How are you possibly supposed to discover, even if you wanted to, what the information is on that product?

All of this is designed, William, to prevent you from getting the information you want right on the package with a simple little symbol—not a sym-

bol that is pejorative, not a symbol that is scary—chosen by the FDA just to give you the information. Brazil uses a "t" in a triangle. That would be fine. It doesn't really matter what the symbol is because citizens who want to know can find out that indicates there are GE ingredients. But, no, that would be giving you information, and the goal of the Monsanto Deny Americans the Right to Know Act is to prevent you from getting information.

I want to turn to Anna in Beaverton, OR. Anna says:

I wanted to ask that you share with your colleagues that this bill is insulting to the intelligence of Americans, limits citizens the right to make safe choices when purchasing food; hamstringing diet and medical professionals who treat, among other things, food allergies and therefore could result in an allergic person ingesting a food fraction that could result in a serious, even fatal, allergic reaction.

Here is the point: This bill is an insult to the intelligence of Americans. Anna, you have this right. This is about Senators who do not respect your intelligence, who do not honor your right to make a decision as a consumer. They know that this is an incredibly popular idea to put a symbol or phrase on a package to indicate it has key ingredients because citizens want to know. The Members here know this, and they don't care because they want to make the decision for you. They do not want to allow you freedom to make your own choices. They do not consider you to be an adult. They want to treat you like a child who is fed only the information they want to give you.

So, Anna, I am deeply disturbed about this insulting legislation that tears down the intelligence of our American citizens, that says to the 9 out of 10 Americans in every State in this Union that we want to strip away your ability to make your own choice.

Keri from Eugene writes: "Why are we protecting large conglomerates and processed food companies instead of protecting the American people and the land?"

Well, that is a good question, Keri. I suppose it is because these companies make huge donations under the constitutional decisions of our Supreme Court.

It is a very interesting story about the evolution of our country. When our forefathers got together to draft the Constitution, they had a vision of citizens having an equal voice. That decision was somewhat flawed, as we all know—flaws we corrected over time related to race, related to gender. But the fundamental principle was that citizens got to have an equal voice.

What they pictured was this: They pictured a town commons, which cost nothing to participate in, and each citizen could get up and share their view in that town commons, could share their view before the town voted, or could share that view equally with the person representing them in Congress. This is what Thomas Jefferson called the mother principle—that we are only

a republic to the degree that the decisions we make reflect the will of the people. He said for that to happen, the citizens have to have an equal voice. Those are the words he used: "equal voice" and "mother principle." Lincoln talked about the same thing: equal voice as the foundation of our Nation.

So when you ask the question, Keri, about why are we protecting large conglomerates at the expense of where the American people stand, you have to go back 40 years ago to a case called *Buckley v. Valeo*. In *Buckley v. Valeo*, the Supreme Court stood this principle—the mother principle of equal voice—on its head because now we have a commons that is for sale. The commons is the television. The commons is the radio. The commons is the information on Web sites.

They basically said that Americans could buy as much of that commons as they want. So instead of an equal voice, Jefferson's mother principle, we instead have a completely unequal voice. Those with fabulous wealth have the equivalent of a stadium sound system, and they use it to drown out the voice of ordinary Americans.

Then a couple of years ago, on a 5-to-4 decision of the Supreme Court, they doubled down on the destruction of our "We the People" Nation. They tore those three words out of the start of our Constitution, and they did so by saying: You know what. We are going to allow the board members of a corporation to utilize their owners' money for the political purposes that the board wants to use, and they don't have to even inform the owners of the company that they are using their money for these political purposes. So we have this vast concentration of power in corporations because corporations are large. If they have a small board, the board says: We want to influence politics in this fashion, and we don't even have to tell the owners about it. So that is a hugely additional destructive force on top of *Buckley v. Valeo*. There is nothing in the Constitution that comes close to saying that corporations are people, and there certainly is nothing that says a few people who sit in the decisionmaking capacity should be able to take other people's money and spend it for their own political purposes. It was never envisioned.

Between these decisions over several decades, we have destroyed the very premise of our Constitution, Thomas Jefferson's mother principle, that we are only a republic to the degree that we reflect the will of the people.

That is the best I can do, Keri, to explain how it is possible that this bill, which flies in the face of 9 out of 10 Americans, has made it to this floor. This bill didn't go through committee. We have leadership in this body that pledged regular order. They were going to put things through committee and bring bills to the floor that had been passed by committee. But this hasn't been. That is how much, as Keri put it,

“large conglomerates” are influencing what happens here in this Senate.

Judith of Grants Pass says:

Please do NOT support [this bill] that would block states from requiring labels on genetically modified foods. People have a right to know [whether or not they are considered safe].

She is right. She is absolutely right. It is whether or not there they are considered safe. This isn't a scientific debate. There is science of concerns—science that I have laid out here on the floor. There is also science about benefits. But that is not the issue. The issue is a citizen's right to make their own decision. If they are concerned about the massive increase in herbicides and the destruction it does to the soil, they have a right to exercise that in the marketplace. If they are concerned about the massive amount of runoff of herbicides affecting the basic food chains in our streams and rivers, they have that right. If they are concerned about the fact that there has been some movement of genes from crops to related weeds that then become resistant to herbicides, that is their business. If they are concerned that Bt corn is producing superbugs resistant to the pesticide, that is their business.

These are not phantom ideas or phantom concerns. These are scientifically documented concerns. None of this says it is unsafe to put in your mouth. I hear that all the time: Well, it is not unsafe to put these GE things in your mouth. But here is the thing: That isn't the basis on which we label. We label things people care about, and there are implications to how things are grown and their impact.

For example, we have a Federal law that says grocery stores have to label the difference between wild fish and farmed fish. Why is that? Well, there are implications to what happens in different types of farms, and citizens are given a heads-up by this law, and they can decide. They can look into it and see if it is a concern. They may not be at all concerned about how catfish are raised in a farm setting, but they may be very concerned about how salmon are raised in farm settings because we find there are some bad effects of salmon raised in pens in the ocean that transfer disease to wild salmon. That is their right. They get to look into that. We give them that ability by requiring this information be on the package.

I don't hear anyone in this Chamber standing up right now and saying they want to strip our packages of the information of wild fish versus farmed fish. We have basic information on packages regarding whether juice is fresh or whether it is created from concentrate because citizens care about the difference. So we give them this basic information to facilitate their choice. And that is the point: We facilitate their choice.

Kimberly writes in:

I am writing you today to urge you to vote no on . . . [anything that would] block Vermont's . . . [bill].

The right to know what we eat is critical.

Richard from Portland writes: “I urge you to filibuster, if need be, to stop the ‘Dark Act.’”

Well, I would like to do that, RICHARD. I would like to do anything I can to slow this down so the American people know what is going on. But here is the level of cynicism in this Chamber: Last night, when the majority leader filed this bill, which has never gone through committee, he simultaneously filed a petition to close debate. Under the rules of the Senate, that means, after an intervening day, there is going to be a vote, and there is no way that my speaking here day and night can stop it because it is embedded in the basic rules.

However, I can try to come to this floor several times and lay out these basic arguments and hope to wake up America to what is being plotted and planned in this Chamber right now. So that is what I am trying to do. I hope that it will have an impact. I hope that when the vote comes tomorrow morning after this intervening day—Tuesday being the intervening day—that my colleagues will say this is just wrong—stripping from Americans the right to know something 9 out of 10 Americans want, stripping States of the ability to respond to their citizens' desires, shutting down a single State laboratory in Vermont when there is no conflict on labels at this point because only one State is implementing a law.

I hope that they will say: You know what. This should be properly considered in committee. This bill should be in committee. It should be given full opportunity when it does come to the floor—and I assume it would—to be openly amended so that anyone who wants to put forward an amendment would be able to do so. That is the way the Senate used to work.

When I was here as an intern in 1976, I was asked to staff the Tax Reform Act of that year. I sat up in the staff gallery. At that point there was no television on this floor; therefore, nobody outside this room could track what was going on. There were no cell phones. There was no other way to convey what was occurring. So the staff sat up in the staff gallery, and when a vote was called, you would go down the staircase to the elevator just outside here. You would meet your Senator, and you would brief your Senator on the debate that was happening on that amendment. That is what I did—amendment after amendment, day after day. Then, as soon as that amendment was voted on, there would be a group of Senators seeking recognition of the Presiding Officer, and you would hear everyone simultaneously go, “Mr. President,” because the rule is that the Presiding Officer is supposed to recognize the very first person he or she hears, and so everyone tried to be first the moment that an amendment was done, the moment the vote was announced. Well, with all those people simultaneously

seeking the attention of the Chair, it is really impossible for the Chair to sort out exactly who is speaking first. So they call on someone on the left side of the Chamber, and then, when that amendment was done an hour later—because they would debate it for an hour and hold the vote; when the vote was done, they called on somebody on the right side of the Chamber. They worked it back and forth so that everyone got to have their amendment heard. That is an open amendment process.

I have heard many of my colleagues across the aisle call for that kind of process when the Democrats were in charge, and I support that kind of process. I supported it when I was in the majority; I support it when I am in the minority. Everything I have proposed or talked about to make this Senate Chamber work better as a legislative body I have supported consistently, whether I am in the majority or whether I am in the minority.

So here is the thing. We have the opposite of that right now. We don't have the Senate of the 1970s, where Senators honor their right to debate and have an open amendment process. That would really change this. That would provide an opportunity for all viewpoints to be heard. We would never have had a cloture motion filed within seconds of the bill first being put on the floor, and it would have been incredibly rare for a bill that had not gone through committee to be put on the floor.

We have to reclaim the legislative process, and right now we don't have it. So that is a great reason to vote no tomorrow morning. Voting no tomorrow morning is the right vote if you believe in States' rights. It is the right vote if you believe in the consumers' right to know, the citizens' right to know. And it is the right vote if you believe we shouldn't have a process in this Chamber that just jams through something for a powerful special interest at the expense of the 9 or 10 Americans who want this information.

So tomorrow, colleagues, let's turn down this insult to the intelligence of Americans, this assault on States' rights, this deprivation, this attack on the freedom of our citizens.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

FILLING THE SUPREME COURT VACANCY

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, the next Supreme Court Justice could dramatically change the direction of the Court. And the majority of this body believes the American people shouldn't be denied the opportunity to weigh in on this question. We believe there should be a debate about the role of Supreme Court Justices in our constitutional system.

With that in mind, I wanted to spend a few minutes discussing the appropriate role of the Court. Before I turn to that, I wish to note that the minority leader continues his daily missives on the Supreme Court vacancy.