

and should, still help thousands of retailers avoid the same fate by leveling the playing field for Main Street retailers.

For the first time in history, consumers said they made more of their purchases online than in stores.

This trend is evidenced by an increase in online retail spending, which grew 14.6 percent last year, to \$341 billion, and is projected to reach \$523 billion in 2020.

During the weekend following Thanksgiving—the biggest shopping weekend of the year—online retail spending was over \$9.3 billion, a 16.4 percent increase from 2015.

As online sales increase, the potential sales tax revenue that States lose increases.

The longer we delay in closing this loophole, the longer we perpetuate an uneven playing field between local and online retailers that erodes the revenues needed by State and local governments to fund essential public services.

Despite the looming budget deficits State and local governments are facing and the competitive disadvantage experienced by brick and mortar businesses, House Republicans have refused to address the issue for more than a decade.

This year is no different.

Numerous requests to the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee to markup e-fairness legislation from the ranking member and other bipartisan members on committee, Main Street retailers, State and local governments, labor, and the sponsors of the Marketplace Fairness Act remain unanswered.

Instead, Chairman GOODLATTE drafted his own proposal that created more problems than it solved.

I didn't support the chairman's proposal, but I supported the process and his calls for regular order and encouraged him to work with his colleagues in the House to send us a bill so that we can resolve our differences.

We are still waiting.

The chairman has continued to refuse to work with us on reasonable compromise legislation that didn't turn 100 years of sales and use tax law on its head, even though he doesn't have the support of the majority of the House Republican Caucus on his approach.

It is apparent that these calls for compromise and regular order are nothing more than veiled attempts to delay and obstruct, which have so far been successful.

If Congress continues to ignore this issue and fails to act, the courts will.

Because States are missing out on an estimated \$23 billion a year in potential sales tax revenue, they are looking to the courts for a solution, heeding the call from Supreme Court Justice Kennedy to reexamine the Court's precedent on the issue.

This year alone, 16 States have introduced over 40 sales tax bills, and others have enacted legislation that have triggered legal challenges that would help

States collect sales tax without congressional action.

This week, a Federal court in South Dakota will begin hearing oral arguments on a South Dakota law that requires remote retailers to collect and remit sales tax.

And we may know, as early as next week, if the Supreme Court will grant review of a law Colorado recently enacted that imposes reporting and notification requirements on remote retailers.

Let me be clear. This is not the approach I prefer. I would rather Congress do its job to pass a uniform, comprehensive Federal solution instead of the States moving forward individually so we don't have a patch work of laws that small businesses have to navigate.

But I understand that, in the absence of Congressional action, the States have no other options. They must either raise taxes or cut vital public services if Congress continues to sit on the sidelines.

As you can see, the States are no longer waiting for Congress to get its act together.

But there is still time for us address this issue.

And I hope my colleagues in the House will work with me to do that before it is too late.

#### ELECT AND FREEING OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE GAMBIA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, in recent years, we have seen a troubling trend of democratic backsliding in several parts of the world, including Russia, Thailand, Uganda, Turkey, and Venezuela.

Even some parts of Europe and the United States have seen long established democratic norms challenged in deeply upsetting ways.

So imagine my great surprise late last week when the people of The Gambia peacefully voted for a new democratic government.

Many probably don't know much about The Gambia—a small West African nation whose uniquely odd colonial borders have it straddling the meandering Gambia River almost completely surrounded by Senegal.

Gambia is English speaking—Senegal speaks French—with several local languages shared between the unusual borders.

Some of you may remember The Gambia was the ancestral home in the novel and then-television miniseries "Roots."

Because of its strong ties to the U.S. and geographic location, for some time The Gambia also had a unique distinction of being an emergency landing spot for the Space Shuttle should one need to abort its mission early in the launch phase.

And until 1994, it had the proud distinction of being the longest postcolonial democracy on the African continent.

You see, for the last 22 years, The Gambia was ruled by a regime that

took power in a coup, with troubling arrests and disappearances of journalists, activists, and opposition members.

I and several of my Senate colleagues raised a number of these cases over the years, most notably the 2007 disappearance of journalist Ebrima Manneh—for which I now hope there will finally be a fair and healing accounting.

And yet, last Thursday night, the people of The Gambia, voting with colored marbles placed in different containers to make it easier for illiterate voters, chose a new leader in a peaceful and democratic process.

And outgoing President Yahya Jammeh honorably conceded the election and agreed to a peaceful transfer of power.

He offered to help President-Elect Adama Barrow.

While we have had our differences, I want to acknowledge this important act of leadership and love of country by outgoing President Jammeh.

And not only has there been this notable peaceful transfer of power, but in just the few short days since the election, at least 18 political prisoners have been released from jail, including a key opposition figure.

So to the Gambian people, let me say congratulations on your important demonstration of democracy—a model for the African continent and the world.

I look forward to significantly improved relations between our two nations and working together on a host of shared concerns.

#### TRIBUTE TO BARBARA MIKULSKI

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, history is dotted with the stories of trailblazers. People who shape the public discourse at a pivotal moment in time or change the direction of the debate. One of those trailblazers is BARBARA MIKULSKI, the longest serving woman in Senate history, the first woman to represent Maryland in the U.S. Senate, and the first woman to chair the Senate's Appropriations Committee. She is tough. She is direct. She is dedicated. She is a fighter. She is a leader.

BARBARA MIKULSKI has always fought for our families and our children. From her roots as a social worker and community activist to the levels of leadership in the Senate, she has held firm to her adage that she is not just the Senator from Maryland, she is the Senator for Maryland. From her first years in the Senate until now, she has promoted education, nutrition, healthcare, and gender equality in the Senate.

She led our historic efforts to pass the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act—shouting from the rooftops the simple principle that women deserve equal pay for equal work. She continued that legacy with the Paycheck Fairness Act. Wouldn't it be a fitting tribute if the Senate considered and approved that commonsense legislation before she retires?