

**Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
Business Meeting, December 9, 2015**

As submitted for the record:

Good morning.

Today our committee will be holding its eighth business meeting of the year. I'd like to take a minute to highlight one of my bills on the agenda, the Dr. Chris Kirkpatrick Whistleblower Protection Act of 2015. The bill honors the late Dr. Chris Kirkpatrick, a psychologist at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Tomah, Wis., who was fired after he questioned the overprescription of opioids for veterans being treated at the facility. Let's be clear: Dr. Kirkpatrick was retaliated against and eventually fired for blowing the whistle on life-threatening practices at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Tragically, on the day of his termination, Dr. Kirkpatrick took his own life.

Supervisor retaliation against whistleblowers happens all across the federal government. As my staff has begun to look into this, we see that it is happening at alarming rates, often with little consequence. This bill would strengthen penalties for those who retaliate against whistleblowers, add protections for probationary period employees, give greater authority to the Office of Special Counsel to investigate prohibited personnel actions, and ensure federal employees have a greater knowledge of whistleblower protections. It also ensures that accessing the medical file of an employee to retaliate for blowing the whistle — something that we have seen happens all too often at the Department of Veterans Affairs — is treated as a prohibited personnel action and that supervisors are punished accordingly.

The committee will also consider a bill that I have sponsored with Senators Warner, Blunt, Portman and Lankford, the Federal Asset Sale and Transfer Act of 2015. This bipartisan bill creates an independent process that cuts through the bureaucratic red tape to identify and sell unneeded federal government-owned properties. The end result will be a reduction in the size of the federal real property inventory, and revenue will be generated for the federal government.

We have set a bipartisan goal “to enhance the economic and national security of America,” and I believe we have pursued areas of agreement to find bipartisan ways to help keep Americans safe and prosperous. Prior to today, this committee passed 50 bills, each one of them on a bipartisan basis. Importantly, each member of this committee has had a bill he or she sponsored or cosponsored pass our committee. I am proud of the work this committee has done this year, and I am grateful to my ranking member, Senator Carper, members of the committee, and all their staff for their hard work.