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Senate

The Senate met at 11:01 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's opening prayer will be offered by RDML Brent W. Scott, Deputy Chief of Chaplains for the U.S. Navy and Chaplain of the Marine Corps in Washington, DC.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Please join me in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we begin this day in the privilege of prayer, thanking You for this great Nation, a people gathered from every tongue and tribe, bound together through the more noble ideals of liberty and justice and equality, formed and favored as one Nation under God. We ask Your help as You continue to make us as one.

We pray for our Senate in this session and ask You to bless them with wisdom and discernment to lead our people toward reconciliation, to rebuild our Nation's confidence in justice, to restore our sense of equality. Free each one from the divisive distractions of any lesser ideals that they may more powerfully serve the people as a body of, by, and for the people, making every effort to keep and protect a more perfect union.

We pray blessing for the men and women who wear our Nation's cloth, standing watch in every corner and clime of the globe. Give them peace as they bring peace to this troubled world.

We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

NOTICE

If the 114th Congress, 1st Session, adjourns sine die on or before December 24, 2015, a final issue of the *Congressional Record* for the 114th Congress, 1st Session, will be published on Thursday, December 31, 2015, to permit Members to insert statements.

All material for insertion must be signed by the Member and delivered to the respective offices of the Official Reporters of Debates (Room HT–59 or S–123 of the Capitol), Monday through Friday, between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. through Wednesday, December 30. The final issue will be dated Thursday, December 31, 2015, and will be delivered on Monday, January 4, 2016.

None of the material printed in the final issue of the *Congressional Record* may contain subject matter, or relate to any event, that occurred after the sine die date.

Senators' statements should also be formatted according to the instructions at http://webster.senate.gov/secretary/Departments/Reporters__Debates/resources/cong__record.pdf, and submitted electronically, either on a disk to accompany the signed statement, or by e-mail to the Official Reporters of Debates at "Record@Sec.Senate.gov".

Members of the House of Representatives' statements may also be submitted electronically by e-mail, to accompany the signed statement, and formatted according to the instructions for the Extensions of Remarks template at https://housenet.house.gov/legislative/research-and-reference/transcripts-and-records/electronic-congressional-record-inserts. The Official Reporters will transmit to GPO the template formatted electronic file only after receipt of, and authentication with, the hard copy, and signed manuscript. Deliver statements to the Official Reporters in Room HT–59.

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By order of the Joint Committee on Printing.

GREGG HARPER, *Chairman.*

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

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PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The majority leader is recognized.

APPROPRIATIONS AND TAX RELIEF AGREEMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I said yesterday that committees and Members from both sides were making important progress in the appropriations and tax relief negotiations.

As colleagues now know, last night the committees and Members reached agreement and filed legislation over in the House. I just participated in a productive meeting where the committees walked our conference through details of this legislation. I know our colleagues across the aisle are discussing the matter as well. I will have more to say on this soon. Now is the time for Members to review the legislation for themselves. I would encourage them to do so. I would also encourage Members to debate it.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

OMNIBUS AND TAX EXTENDERS AGREEMENT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as the Republican leader mentioned, last night the Senate and House leaders finalized a bipartisan compromise that keeps our government open and funded and extends important tax policies for American families and businesses.

I said last night—define ''last night.'' The last email I got was 2:45 this morning from my chief of staff, who was one of the negotiators. Sometime in the darkness, the bill was finalized. When I say ''the bill,'' it is really two bills—a bipartisan compromise keeps our doors opened and funded and extends important tax policies for American businesses.

This was not an easy process. Members and our staffs worked intensely for weeks to craft this agreement. As I mentioned yesterday and I say again today, I appreciate the cooperation, expertise, and all the good work done by Speaker RYAN, Leader PELOSI, Senator MCCONNELL, and their staffs. They were, I am told—and in all my dealings with them, I underscore and underline what my chief of staff Drew Willison, chief negotiator, said of the staff. They were a pleasure to work with. They were professional and did exceptional work on the agreement that we reached.

It is a good compromise. The Presiding Officer, not being a longtime Member of Congress but a longtime legislator, knows that no legislation is perfect, but this is good legislation. This is truly a fine definition of legislation—the art of compromise. When we say ''compromise,'' it doesn't mean anyone is doing away with their principles; what it simply means is that people can't be bullheaded and unreasonable in what they are doing to accomplish their goals.

In spite of Republican majorities in the Senate and the House, we Democrats were able to ensure that this legislation creates and saves middle-class jobs, protects the environment, and invests in renewable energy sources. For example, by extending tax incentives for wind, solar, geothermal, and other technologies, the omnibus spending bill will create and protect over 100,000 jobs in the clean energy sector. A 5-year extension of wind and solar credits will promote growth and help curb carbon emission by roughly 25 percent by the year 2020. And to those who will argue that lifting the oil export ban will counteract these important steps to limit pollution, that is simply not the case. It is not true. Extending the wind and solar tax incentives will eliminate over 10 times more carbon emissions than lifting the oil export ban will create.

The omnibus spending bill is good for jobs, and good for clean energy and the environment. It also helps American families by including a provision that will lower health insurance premiums.

To fully appreciate the compromise, we can't simply tick off the many beneficial policies the agreement includes. We must also consider that many troublesome provisions the Democrats fought to exclude didn't wind up in the legislation. When this matter came from the House, there were more than 200 so-called riders, and they didn't wind up in the bill. Many of these riders represented the worst of legislative priorities: weaken Dodd-Frank banking regulations; undermine the Department of Labor's fiduciary rule; roll back the National Labor Relations Board's joint employer standard; eliminate protections for clean air, water, land, and climate; weaken the consumer protection bureau's ability to protect consumers; curb the President's powers under the Antiquities Act to create national monuments; and destroy the candidate contribution limits. These are only a few of the many special riders that were sent to us from the House, and we did not allow 99 percent of these to be included because they are harmful policies.

I say again, this compromise isn't perfect, but it is good. It is good for the American people. And if it weren't for Democratic efforts, it would have been a lot worse.

I also extend my appreciation to the great staff of the White House—first of all, the President's Chief of Staff, Denis McDonough. He is a former college football player, he is a strong man emotionally and physically, and he is very forthright, which I appreciate in the positions that he takes with everybody. He helped guide this legislation through.

We have a number of people who work at the White House with whom we worked intensely. All the Cabinet officers—we had a very good relationship with Brian Deese, who is a jack-of-all-trades at the White House and does so much in many different areas. I appreciate very much his involvement in many different ways.

Longtime Senate employee Katie Beirne Fallon has been available anytime we needed her, and this has been very difficult for her because she is a new mom to two little twins. She was always available. We were disappointed when she went to the White House from the Senate, but her knowledge of the Senate has been helpful in our being able to move this bill as far as it has been.

A longtime staffer who operated on the floor here for many, many years was Marty Paone, who was available whenever we needed him. He is a fine man. We still miss him here in the Senate. He does such a great job for the country and the Senate.

We must pass the legislation, as the Republican leader said, as quickly as we can. Christmas is fast approaching. I hope Republicans in the House and the Senate will move quickly to move this legislation to the floor so we can vote on it and give the American people every confidence their government will remain open.

Would the Presiding Officer state what the Senate will be doing the rest of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 6 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE BUDGET AND TAX EXTENDERS

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise today to call attention to the significant contributions public servants

make to our Nation each day. It appears that we are close to the final conclusion to the budget and tax extenders debate, and hopefully we will soon all be able to go home to see our families. I have a little easier opportunity with that than the Presiding Officer.

It does appear that this year we may be able to put together a 2-year budget process, which is a step in the right direction. Too often Congress punts on its public responsibilities with stopgap solutions to our country's problems. Through all these challenges, though, our public servants, particularly our Federal employees, with little recognition and less fanfare work through these ups and downs to improve Americans' lives.

TRIBUTE TO FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

KEVIN STRICKLIN

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, since 2010, I have come to the Senate floor on an occasional basis to honor exemplary Federal employees, a tradition started by my friend, the former Senator from Delaware Ted Kaufman. Today I am going to continue that tradition as we get to the close of this year.

I am pleased to honor a great Federal employee, Kevin Stricklin, who also happens to be a Virginian. As the administrator for coal at the Mine Safety and Health Administration, Mr. Stricklin leads a team that enforces safety rules, improves industry compliance, and executes rescue and recovery operations.

On his watch, the number of coal miners who died in accidents last year, 16, while still too high, was the lowest ever recorded in the history of the United States. In addition, the number of mines with chronic violations dropped from 51 in 2010 to 12 in 2014, and the number of citations against mines fell from more than 96,000 in 2010 to less than 63,000 in 2014, even as inspections increased.

After the Upper Big Branch Mine disaster in 2010, Mr. Stricklin was at the frontlines of implementing reforms to improve mine safety, including quarterly inspections, surprise inspections for repeat violators, and a program that identifies habitual safety lapses.

When accidents have occurred, Mr. Stricklin's creativity and calm under pressure have saved countless lives. In a 2002 accident, a Pennsylvania coal mine flooded, trapping nine miners. Mr. Stricklin and his team devised a plan to drill a 6½-inch hole and inject compressed air into it. Their plan provided oxygen to the miners and prevented the water level from rising any further. The miners survived and were hoisted to the surface using a capsule the team helped design.

Following a 2006 accident in West Virginia, rescuers' efforts were impeded by limitations in communicating over long distances. The protocol at that time was 1,000 feet. The team's solution was to develop a wireless fiber-optic system that extended communication up to 5 miles. Mr. Stricklin and his team improved the standard by more than 26 times.

Like so many other Federal employees, they went above and beyond because it was in the country's best interest, not because they expected praise or recognition. Mr. Stricklin, whose two grandfathers and father were all coal miners, describes his objective as being ''for each miner to go home as safe and as healthy at the end of the day as they started at the beginning of the day.''

I am proud to rise today to recognize Mr. Stricklin's dedication to public safety and commitment to public service. I hope my colleagues will join me in thanking him, his team, and, frankly, during the holiday season, all Federal Government employees at all levels of service to our country for their contributions and hard work.

As we go through these final days of debate—and hopefully, as I said at the outset, we will get a chance to spend time with our families over the holidays—I do think it is important that we also take a moment to reflect on the close to 2 million civilian Federal employees who serve our Nation in so many ways each and every day without fanfare.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HATCH. 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. HATCH. Mr. President, I also ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to complete two sets of remarks.

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

PROTECTING AMERICANS FROM TAX HIKES ACT

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, last night after months of discussion and several weeks of intense negotiations, bipartisan leaders from both the House and the Senate reached an agreement on both the substance and a procedural path forward for legislation that will provide millions of American families and businesses with much needed tax relief and set the stage for comprehensive tax reform in the future.

The bill, which we are calling the Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes Act—or PATH Act—of 2015, would make a number of temporary tax provisions permanent, putting an end to the repeated tax extenders exercise that has plagued Congress for decades and giving greater certainty to U.S. taxpayers across the board.

There are no two ways about it; this is a historic bill. It is actually the latest in a long line of historic bills we have considered in the Senate this year, and it has quite a bit in common with some of the other efforts we have tackled in 2015.

For example, for many years now, much of what we have done in Congress has been dictated by the next deadline, cliff or crisis around the corner. More often than not, the tendency has been to simply kick every can down the road and then give speeches about why we shouldn't do that anymore. This year the Senate has worked to end the practice of governing by crisis.

Among other things, we have passed bipartisan legislation to repeal and replace the Medicare sustainable growth rate, or SGR, formula and to provide long-term funding for highway and infrastructure projects. Both of these issues had plagued Congress for decades, with permanent or long-term fixes seemingly always out of reach, regularly demonstrating that Congress was too divided and too ineffective to reach any meaningful solutions.

The same could be said for tax extenders, which has been an almost yearly exercise in relative futility, characterized by partisan bickering as the deadlines approach, with short-term extensions enacted at the last minute, leaving no one—certainly not American taxpayers—feeling better in the end. Yet, with the PATH Act, as with the SGR and highway funding bills, we have been able to reach a bipartisan agreement that would effectively end this cycle.

We have to pass it. According to the Joint Committee on Taxation, 52 separate tax provisions—what we typically refer to as extenders—expired at the end of 2014. That is 52 separate provisions that, on a relatively frequent basis, face expiration and require us to reach agreements on further extensions. Our bill would reduce that number down to 33 provisions—still far too many—but a significant relief in terms of ongoing extenders pressure.

Most importantly, the bill makes permanent many of the most consequential extenders provisions, the ones that tend to drive the crisis-and-cliff mentality when it comes to tax extenders, further relieving the pressure and allowing Congress to function more effectively.

By adding more permanence to the Tax Code, we will allow families and businesses to better plan for the future. In addition, we will adjust the tax and revenue baseline to make conditions vastly more favorable for comprehensive tax reform in the future, a major priority for members of both parties.

Most importantly, passing this legislation and making more tax policies permanent will provide significant tax relief for hardworking taxpayers in every walk of American life, from the middle class to military families to the working poor. It will do the same for businesses and job creators throughout our country, resulting in a healthier U.S. economy, increased growth, and more American jobs.

Put simply, more permanence in the Tax Code will be a good thing for our

country, and the PATH Act will provide just the kind of permanence we need.

Let's take a few minutes to look at some of the key provisions of this legislation. I will start by talking about some of the biggest priorities that my friends on the other side of the aisle brought into the recent negotiations.

As we all remember, President Obama's so-called stimulus included provisions that made some of the biggest refundable tax credits in the Tax Code even more refundable, including the earned-income tax credit, or EITC, and the child tax credit, or CTC. These increased credits—which, when boiled down, are essentially additional cash payments made directly from the government to an individual filing a tax return—were originally designed to be temporary and have had to be extended a number of times over the years.

Going into these negotiations, Democrats essentially demanded that the enhancements for the EITC and CTC, along with a partially refundable college tax credit that was also created in the stimulus, be made permanent.

As you might expect, Republicans were reluctant to go down that road, not because we don't want to help families who benefit from these credits but because we know refundable credits are particularly susceptible to error, fraud, and overpayment. These types of improper payments are well documented, particularly with regard to the EITC, where every year we lose tens of billions of dollars to either deception or bureaucratic mistakes. However, we opted to accept making these credits permanent because doing so allowed the negotiations to move forward. But we did demand—and the Democrats agreed—to include significant provisions to improve the program's integrity with regard to these credits in order to reduce improper payments going forward. In fact, if enacted, the program integrity provisions in this bill will be the most robust improvements to address waste, fraud, and abuse of the Tax Code in nearly 20 years. Essentially, this compromise of refundable credits was the very definition of a win-win situation, particularly when you consider the other provisions that have been included in this legislation as a result, and we really never did this before. We all knew there was fraud.

With this bill, we will be able to secure key incentives for economic growth. For example, the bill makes permanent section 179, small business expensing, which allows small businesses—the drivers of American job creation—to grow and invest with more immediate tax benefits. This has been a top priority for many Members of Congress, not to mention virtually everyone in the business community.

The PATH Act will also improve and make permanent the research and development tax credit, the vital tax provision for companies and industries that thrive on innovation and research—areas where the United States continues to lead the world. This has been something I have fought for every year—year after year after year. We have always gotten it, but it has never really worked as well as it should because there was no permanence to it. Now it will be permanent, and that is a great step forward.

Our bill also extends the term for bonus depreciation, giving more companies greater incentives to invest in assets that will help their businesses grow and expand. This, too, has been a longtime priority for the business community and many Members of Congress. While we were not able to make it permanent, we did improve and extend this important tax incentive.

The bill will also make key improvements to make America more competitive on the world stage. For example, it permanently extends the active financing exception, or AFE, from subpart F income, and it provides a 5-year extension for the controlled foreign corporation, or CFC, look-through provision. Both of these tax provisions give American companies owned by American stockholders and employing American workers a greater ability to compete internationally. This is important if, like me, you want to see U.S. companies remain U.S. companies.

In addition to these top priorities for businesses and job creators in the United States, the PATH Act would provide significant tax relief for families. The bill makes permanent the deduction for State and local sales taxes. It makes permanent the low-income military housing credit and the employer wage credit for Active-Duty military employees. It provides a long-term extension and an expansion of eligibility for work opportunity tax credits. All of these provisions benefit American families in various regions under a number of different circumstances. Our legislation will ensure that millions of Americans who benefit from these tax provisions will be able to rely on and plan around them well into the future—not a bad result, if you can ask me.

I am not done yet. In addition to the many benefits we will provide to families and businesses, the PATH Act will also give significant tax relief to charities. It would, for example, make sure that charitable distributions from IRAs remain tax-free on a permanent basis, and the charitable deduction for contributions of food inventory would also be made permanent under the bill, as would the provision that incentivizes S corporations to make charitable contributions of property.

I have covered quite a bit of ground here, and I am really only going through the highlights. I haven't even gotten to the ObamaCare provisions yet.

As we negotiated this legislation, the most difficult part was probably dealing with the rumor mill, which I suppose was not unexpected. Most of the really outrageous rumors we heard during this process dealt with provisions of the so-called Affordable Care Act. People were claiming that Senate Republicans had agreed to bail out the ObamaCare Risk Corridor Program in order to get a deal. We heard that there was an agreement to provide tax relief to prop up the failing ObamaCare exchanges. But, of course, none of these rumors were true. This exercise in tax permanence was never going to be used to solidify ObamaCare, and Republicans never for a second considered allowing that to happen.

However, because many Democrats have begun to recognize some of the more problematic elements of the President's health law, we agreed on the need to suspend one of the more harmful taxes imposed under ObamaCare. The bill includes a 2-year moratorium on the medical device tax—one of the more unpopular and poorly drafted taxes included in the health law that has in recent years drawn the ire of Republicans and Democrats alike. This moratorium is important not only because it demonstrates the bipartisan opposition to the tax, but because it will help patients and consumers throughout the country who have seen their health care costs go up because of the medical device tax. I have been a particular advocate to get rid of that lousy tax, and we are ultimately going to get rid of it, but at least we are rid of it for the next 2 years. We will see what happens in those 2 years.

When all is said and done, this legislation provides roughly $650 billion in tax relief over the next 10 years for families, job creators, and others. That is real money that will help millions of people and provide real growth for our economy. That is the real value of greater permanence in our Tax Code and is the biggest reason we need to pass this legislation.

Don't get me wrong: I don't believe this is a perfect bill by any means. It is not even close to perfect. As I have grown fond of saying, if we were living in the United States of ORRIN HATCH, this legislation would look a lot different. Although it pains me to admit sometimes, that is not where we live. Here in the real world, any undertaking worth the effort is going to require compromise. I know I say that a lot. In fact, I probably said something about the importance of compromise and learning the art of the doable every time we have considered a high-profile piece of legislation this year, but that does not make my arguments any less true.

This is a good bill, period. Anyone, if they are so inclined, could cling to the parts they don't like and make excuses to vote no. Taken as a whole, both parties should be able to support the overall package we put together, and without question, every one of us should welcome the positive impact this bill will have on our economy and our future legislative efforts here in the Congress.

I urge all of my colleagues to support the PATH Act and provide real tax relief at this critical time.

Before I close, I just have to note that a lot of work has gone into this legislation. Every provision of this bill has had a number of champions in the Congress who have worked for years to preserve and enhance these provisions in the hopes of eventually making them permanent. I want to acknowledge some of those efforts here today, particularly those of my colleagues on the Senate Finance Committee. For example, the deduction for State and local sales taxes, which this bill makes permanent, has had a number of champions on both sides of the aisle. In our committee, Senators ENZI, CORNYN, THUNE, and HELLER have all made this issue a priority, and our legislation will ensure that their work pays off.

Another one of the more significant tax provisions this bill would make permanent is the research and development tax credit. This has been a top priority of mine for many years, and Senators CORNYN, CRAPO, and ROBERTS have also played leading rolls in this effort over the years.

Section 179, small business expensing, will also be made permanent under this bill, and Senators TOOMEY, ROBERTS, THUNE, PORTMAN, and ISAKSON have all been leaders on this issue for many years.

The bill would also make permanent the accelerated 15-year depreciation for restaurants and retail, a provision that Senators BURR, CORNYN, CRAPO, HELLER, ISAKSON, ROBERTS, and PORTMAN have all worked long and hard to keep in place. Of course, I could always add my own name to every one of these.

In addition, Senator ENZI has been a big supporter of making the active financing exception, or AFE, permanent. Our bill, once again, accomplishes this goal.

On the charitable side, Senator ROBERTS has been a strong supporter of the S corporation basis adjustment for charitable contributions and the charitable deduction for food inventory contributions, both of which will be made permanent by passing this bill.

Senator THUNE has also been a leader with regard to the food inventory deduction, and he has also worked to ensure that charitable distributions from IRAs remain tax-free—another permanent provision in the PATH Act and something all Republicans support.

Senator HELLER has championed the special rules for real property contributions made for conservation purposes—yet another item our bill makes permanent.

The deduction for teacher classroom expenses is also made permanent in this bill. Senator BURR has been a strong supporter of that provision and deserves a lot of credit for it.

In addition, the PATH Act will make the low-income housing tax credit permanent—something both Senator ROBERTS and Senator CRAPO have worked on for some time.

All of the people I have mentioned have been very active Members on the Republican side.

Senator PORTMAN has pushed to extend the work opportunity tax credit and to expand it to include the long-term unemployed. His proposed modification is included in our bill, as is an unprecedented 5-year extension for this credit.

Thanks, Senator PORTMAN. We appreciate your work on this.

We have seen him work so hard on so many of these issues. We are grateful for him, and I am really grateful to have all of these people on my committee helping out.

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list. Right now I am focusing mainly on temporary provisions that we will make permanent by passing the PATH Act. If I start talking about my various colleagues' efforts on shorter term extensions in the bill, we would be here all day.

I do, however, also want to give credit where it is due on the ObamaCare provisions. For years now, opposition to the misguided medical device tax—that is the most charitable description of that tax you will ever hear from me—has been gaining momentum. Throughout that time, Senators TOOMEY, BURR, and COATS have worked very hard on the Finance Committee to push for a repeal. As I noted earlier, our bill would take a significant step forward in this effort by imposing a 2-year moratorium on this job-killing tax.

I might add that I haven't mentioned my colleagues on the other side, but certainly AMY KLOBUCHAR has stood right with me, as have so many on the other side of the aisle as well, in getting rid of that tax. It is only for 2 years, but ultimately we are going to get rid of it completely, and we have to do that.

Let me just say that it is a pleasure for me to work with Senator WYDEN, the ranking member. He has worked with us on many of these issues, and so have others on the Democratic side of the aisle, but the leadership on many of these issues has come from these people I have mentioned, and I want to make sure the people who are listening will understand this.

As one can see, the PATH Act reflects the efforts and priorities of many Members of the Senate—not just members of the Finance Committee but Members on both sides on some of these very important issues, as they would have to be. I thank my Democratic friends for helping.

As the debate on this important bill begins in earnest, I am particularly grateful for the work my colleagues on the Finance Committee have put in to advance the interests of their constituents. Each of our Members has put a huge stamp on this legislation, and with a little luck and a handful more votes, their work will be permanently enshrined in the Tax Code, and that is no small achievement after all of these years of trying to make some of these provisions permanent.

There are, of course, others who have also worked hard on various parts of this bill. Virtually every Senator—or at the very least every Senator's constituents—has high-priority items included in this bill. That is a big reason why it is important that we get this done for the American people.

Again, I am happy to bring together both Democrats and Republicans on this important set of tax changes that is long overdue. I am very pleased to work with my Democratic colleagues as well, many of whom deserve credit. Being in the majority, we had to have the efforts of these Republican people whom I have been praising here today.

REMEMBERING NATHAN GRAHAM

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I wish to pay tribute to a beloved Utahn who was taken years before his time—Nathan Graham. Nate was not only a celebrated member of the tightly knit community of Utahns here in Washington but was also a well-respected former staffer of the U.S. Senate.

Tragically, at the young age of 37, Nate was struck by a random infection and passed away unexpectedly while on a business trip to China last week. Although he is no longer with us, the great love he shared with others remains in our hearts.

Born in Layton, UT, Nate graduated from Northridge High School before studying political science at Weber State University and moving to Washington, DC. From 2003 to 2009, he served as a legislative assistant for my friend and former colleague Senator Robert F. Bennett. Nate was Senator Bennett's key staffer on the Transatlantic Policy Network—a group that includes U.S. and European elected officials as well as business, policy, and academic leaders in Europe and the United States.

As a military legislative assistant, Nate also worked closely with combat leaders at Utah's military installations, including Hill Air Force Base, the Dugway Proving Ground, and the Utah Test and Training Range. In this capacity, he also advanced Senator Bennett's priorities on the Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs. The Senator's agenda included increasing funding for microfinance programs, strengthening the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and working to acquire the F–35 aircraft at Hill Air Force Base. As Senator Bennett's trusted adviser, he accompanied the Senator to Europe several times for TPN business and meetings. He also traveled to Egypt, Taiwan, and China in support of Senator Bennett's work on foreign policy.

Nate's trademark humility endeared him to all. He never thought himself above anyone else, and he was always helpful and kind to everyone, regardless of status or position. Nate even

had a special reputation as a mentor to Senator Bennett's junior staff. He looked out for young staffers just starting their careers and actively searched out new experiences for their professional development.

Following his time in the Senate, Nate entered the private sector, accepting a position with Procter & Gamble as their senior manager for global government relations and public policy.

Although Nate never worked for me directly, he was a gifted public servant whose contributions were highly regarded across the entire Utah delegation and by me personally. Speaking to Nate's character, Senator Bennett—who is going through his own personal battle with cancer right now—sent me the following note over the weekend:

> Nate Graham was a valued and much-loved member of my staff who was on track for great success in life, both professionally and with his beautiful family. This is a terrible tragedy. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family. We will miss him terribly.

While Nate was working for Senator Bennett, he met and fell in love with his sweetheart and eternal companion, Melanie Mickelson. I know Bob was delighted when he could be a matchmaker for some of his staffers.

In addition to Melanie, Nate is survived by their four sons: Rowen, James, Lincoln, and Griffin—who was born just 2 months ago. Nate was an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, having served an LDS mission in Honduras and Belize. Just 6 weeks before he passed away, he was released as the bishop of a local congregation in Arlington, VA, where he built a reputation for fostering a community of love and friendship.

A tidal wave of support has washed over the Graham family in the wake of Nate's passing. In just a few days, friends and neighbors have already raised nearly $100,000 in a crowdfunding effort to support this family.

I wish to close with the words of the Scottish poet Henry Francis Lyte, from his hymn, ''Abide With Me,'' which he wrote on his deathbed in 1847. This song is well beloved across the LDS community. It offers comfort and peace amid the sadness of loss:

> I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
> Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
> Where is death's sting?
> Where, grave, thy victory?
> I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

We believe Nate now abides in a holier place. His family is in our thoughts just as they are in our prayers. May God comfort them, and may He comfort all of us as we mourn the loss of an exceptional friend, father, and husband.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Senator from Arizona.

RUSSIAN ROCKET ENGINES POLICY PROVISION

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I rise to call attention, sadly, to the triumph of pork-barrel parochialism in this year's Omnibus appropriations bill—in particular, a policy provision that was airdropped into this bill, in direct contravention to the National Defense Authorization Act, which will have U.S. taxpayers subsidize Russian aggression and ''comrade'' capitalism.

Nearly 2 years ago, Russian President Vladimir Putin, furious that the Ukrainian people had ousted a pro-Moscow stooge, invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea. It is the first time since the days of Hitler and Stalin that brute force has been projected across an internationally recognized border to dismember a sovereign state on the European Continent. More than 8,000 people have died in this conflict, including 298 innocent people aboard Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 who were murdered by Vladimir Putin's loyal supporters with weapons that Vladimir Putin had supplied them.

Putin's imperialist campaign in Eastern Europe forced a recognition, for anyone who was not yet convinced, that we are confronting a challenge that many had assumed was resigned to the history books: a strong, militarily capable Russian Government that is hostile to our interests and our values and seeks to challenge the international order that American leaders of both parties have sought to maintain since the end of World War II.

That is why the Congress imposed tough sanctions against Russia, especially against Putin's cronies and their enormously corrupt business empire. As part of that effort, Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2015, which restricted the Air Force from using Russian-made RD–180 rocket engines for national security space launches—engines that are manufactured by a Russian company controlled by some of Putin's top cronies. We did so not only because our Nation should not rely on Russia to access space but because it is simply immoral to help subsidize Russia's intervention in Ukraine and line the pockets of Putin's gang of thugs who profit from the sale of Russian rocket engines.

Last year the Defense authorization bill exempted five of the engines that United Launch Alliance purchased before the invasion of Ukraine. This allowed ULA, the space launch company that for years has enjoyed a monopoly on launching military satellites, to use those Russian rocket engines if the Secretary of Defense determined it was necessitated by national security.

Since the passage of the act in the Senate 89 to 11, Russia has continued—as we all know—to destabilize Ukraine and menace our NATO allies in Europe with aggressive military behavior. Putin has sent advanced weapons to Iran, violated the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty. In a profound echo of the Cold War, Russia has intervened militarily in Syria on behalf of the murderous regime of Bashar Assad. Clearly, Russian behavior has only gotten worse.

That is why a few weeks ago Congress acted again and passed the National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2016. The NDAA authorized $300 million in security assistance and intelligence support for Ukraine to resist Russian aggression. At the same time, the bill recognized that a small number of Russian engines could be needed—could be needed to maintain competition in the National Security Space Launch Program and facilitate a smooth transition to rockets with engines made in the United States. Therefore, the legislation allowed ULA to use a total of nine Russian engines. The fiscal year 2016 Defense authorization bill, including its provision limiting the use of Russian rocket engines, was debated for months. For months the issue was debated. The Committee on Armed Services had a vigorous debate on this important issue. An amendment was offered to maintain the restriction on the Air Force's use of Russian rocket engines. In a positive vote of the committee, the amendment was adopted.

We then considered hundreds of amendments to this bill on the Senate floor over a period of 2 weeks. For 2 weeks we literally considered hundreds of amendments, and we did so transparently, with an open process which was a credit, frankly, to both sides. There was not one amendment that was called up to change the provision of that authorization bill concerning the RD–180 rocket engines. The legislation passed with 71 votes.

Then, because of a misguided Presidential veto, this defense legislation was actually considered a second time on the floor and it passed 91 to 3. I want to reemphasize, one of the things I was proud of for years is that we do debate the Senate Armed Services national defense authorization bill. We have done so every year for some 43 years, and passed it, and had the President sign it. We open it to all amendments, but there was no amendment on rocket engines proposed on the floor of the Senate. Why wasn't it? If there were Members of the Senate who did not like the provisions in the bill, we had an open process to amend it, but they didn't. They didn't because they knew they could not pass an amendment that would remove that provision in the Defense Authorization Act. So now in the dead of night we just found out, hours before we are supposed to vote, that they put in a restriction which dramatically changes that provision that was done in an open and transparent process. To their everlasting shame, in the dark of night, not

a vote—not a vote—no one consulted on the Armed Services Committee.

The fiscal year 2016 bill, including its provision limiting the use of Russian rocket engines, was debated for months. The committee had a vigorous debate, as I mentioned. Here is my point. The Senate had this debate. We had ample time and opportunity to have this debate. Through months of this fulsome debate, no Senator came to the Senate floor to make the case that we needed to buy more Russian rocket engines, no Senator introduced an amendment on the floor to lift the restriction on buying more Russian rocket engines. To the contrary, the Senate and the full Congress, including the House of Representatives, voted overwhelmingly and repeatedly to maintain this restriction. This is a policy issue, not a money issue—nowhere in the realm of the Appropriations Committee. It was resolved, as it should have been, on the defense policy bill.

Here we stand with a 2,000-page Omnibus appropriations bill crafted in secret. Members outside of the Appropriations Committee were not brought into the formulation of this legislation. There was no debate. Most of us are seeing this bill for the first time this morning, and buried within it is a policy provision that would effectively allow unlimited purchases and use of—guess what—Russian rocket engines.

What is going on here? ULA wants more Russian engines, plain and simple. That is why ULA recently asked the Defense Department to waive the NDAA's previous restriction on the basis of national security and let it use a Russian engine for the first competitive national security space launch. The Defense Department declined.

So what did ULA do when it couldn't get its way? It manufactured a crisis. Though the Department of Defense is restricted in using these Russian rocket engines, there is no similar restriction on NASA or commercial space launches. So ULA rushed to assign the RD–180s—the rocket engines—that it had in its inventory to these nonnational security launches, despite the fact that there is no restriction on the use of Russian engines for those launches. This artificial crisis has now been seized on by ULA's Capitol Hill leading sponsors; namely, the senior Senator from Alabama, Senator SHELBY, and the senior Senator from Illinois, Senator DURBIN, to overturn the NDAA's restriction, and that is exactly what they have done—again, secretly, nontransparently, as part of this massive 2,000-page Omnibus appropriations bill.

As I said, neither Senator SHELBY nor Senator DURBIN, nor any other Senator, raised objections to the provisions of the bill or offered any alternative during the authorization process on the Senate floor. That is a repudiation of the rights of every single Senator in this body who is not a Member of the Appropriations Committee.

In fact, as I have said, when this issue was debated and voted on in the Committee on Armed Services, the authorizing committee of jurisdiction voted in favor of maintaining the restriction. Instead, my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee crafted a provision in secret, with no debate, to overturn the will of the Senate as expressed in two National Defense Authorization Acts. The result will enable a monopolistic corporation to send potentially hundreds of millions of dollars to Vladimir Putin and his corrupt cronies and deepen America's reliance on these thugs for our military's access to space.

This is outrageous and it is shameful. It is the height of hypocrisy, especially from my colleagues who claim to care about the plight of Ukraine and the need to punish Russia for its aggression.

How can our government tell European countries and governments that they need to hold the line on maintaining sanctions on Russia, which is far harder for them to do than for us, when we are getting our own policy in this way? We are gutting our own policy. How can we tell our French allies, in particular, that they should not sell Vladimir Putin amphibious assault ships, as we have, and then turn around and try to buy rocket engines from Putin's cronies? Again, this is the height of hypocrisy. Since March of 2014, my colleagues in the Senate have tried to do everything we can to give our friends in Ukraine the tools they need to defend themselves and their country from Russian aggression. Rather than furthering that noble cause, Senator SHELBY and Senator DURBIN have chosen to reward Vladimir Putin and his cronies with a windfall of hundreds of millions of dollars.

A rocket factory in Alabama may benefit from this provision. Boeing, headquartered in Illinois, may benefit from this decision. But have no doubt, the real winners today are Vladimir Putin and his gang of thugs running the Russian military industrial complex. I wish that Senator SHELBY and Senator DURBIN would explain to the American taxpayer exactly whom we are doing business with. They will not. But my colleagues need to know.

Let me explain. At least one news organization has investigated how much the Air Force pays for these RD–180 rocket engines, how much the Russians receive, and whether members of the elite in Putin's Russia have secretly profited by inflating the price. In an investigative series entitled ''Comrade Capitalism,'' Reuters exposed the role that senior Russian politicians and Putin's close friends, including persons sanctioned over Ukraine, have played in the company called NPO Energomash, which manufactures the RD–180. According to Reuters, a Russian audit of that company found that it had been operating at a loss because funds were, ''being captured by unnamed offshore intermediary companies.''

In addition, the Reuters investigation also reported that NPO Energomash sells its rocket engines to ULA through another company called RD Amross, a tiny five-person outfit that stood to collect about $93 million in cost markups under a multiyear deal to supply these engines. The Defense Contract Management Agency found that in one contract alone, RD Amross did ''no or negligible'' work but still collected $80 million in ''unallowable excessive pass-through charges.''

Now, remember my friends, that is a five-person outfit—five persons. The Defense Contract Management Agency found that in one contract they collected $80 million in unallowable, excessive passthrough charges. My friends, thanks to this amendment, that is who is going to continue to receive this money.

According to University of Baltimore School of Law professor Charles Tiefer, who reviewed Reuters documents, ''The bottom line is that the joint venture between the Russians and Americans is taking us to the cleaners.'' He said that he had reviewed Pentagon audits critical of Iraq war contracts, but those ''didn't come anywhere near to how strongly negative'' the RD Amross audit was.

My colleagues, we have to do better. We have to do better than this. Some may say that we need to buy rocket engines from Putin's cronies in Russia. In particular, they will cite a letter from the Department of Defense, in response to a list of leading questions from the Appropriations Committee just a few days ago, which they will claim as confirmation that the Department believes the United States will not have a domestically manufactured replacement engine for defense space launches before 2022.

Of course, that is nonsense. When the Department of Defense starts making predictions beyond its 5-year budget plan, what I hear is ''This isn't a priority'' or ''We don't really know.'' Either way, this is unacceptable. Both the authorizers and the appropriators have ramped up funding for the development of a new domestically manufactured engine. The Pentagon needs to do what it has failed to do for 8 years: Make this a priority.

Indeed, American companies have already said that they could have a replacement engine ready before 2022. Our money and attention should be focused on meeting this goal, not on subsidizing Putin's defense industry. Proponents of more Russian rocket engines will also cite claims by the Air Force that ULA needs at least 18 RD–180 engines to create a bridge between now and 2022 when a domestically manufactured engine becomes available. This, too, is false.

Today, we have two space launch providers—ULA and SpaceX—that, no matter what happens with the Russian RD–180, will be able to provide fully redundant capabilities with ULA's Delta IV and SpaceX's Falcon 9 and, eventually, the Falcon Heavy space launch

vehicles. There will be no capability gap. The Atlas V is not going anywhere anytime soon. ULA has enough Atlas Vs to get them through at least 2019, if not later. As I alluded a moment ago, the Pentagon agrees that no action is required today to address a risk for assured access to space.

In declining ULA's recent request for a waiver from the Defense authorization bill's restriction, the Deputy Secretary of Defense concluded that they ''do not believe any immediate action is required to address the further risk of having only one source of space launch services.'' Indeed, in its recent letter, the Department of Defense even confirmed that ULA has enough engines to compete for each of the nine upcoming competitions and that the number they will pursue is ''dependent upon ULA's business management strategy.''

So I ask Senator SHELBY and Senator DURBIN: What are your priorities? As we speak, Ukrainians are resisting Russian aggression and fighting to keep their country whole and free. Yet this Omnibus appropriations bill sends hundreds of millions of dollars to Vladimir Putin, his cronies, and Russia's military industrial base as Russia continues to occupy Crimea and to destabilize Ukraine and their neighbors in the region. What kind of message does that send to Ukrainians who have been fighting and dying to protect their country? How can we do this when Putin is menacing our NATO allies in Europe? How can we do this when Russia continues to send weapons to Iran? How can we do this when Putin continues to violate the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty? How can we do this when Putin is bombing U.S.-backed forces in Syria fighting the murderous Assad regime?

I understand that some constituents of Senator SHELBY and Senator DURBIN believe they would benefit from this provision, but as the New York Times editorial board stated earlier this year:

> When sanctions are necessary, the countries that impose them must be willing to pay a cost, too. After leaning on France to cancel the sale of two ships to Russia because of the invasion of Ukraine, the United States can hardly insist on continuing to buy national security hardware from one of Mr. Putin's cronies.

I repeat; that is from the New York Times, an editorial dated June 5, 2015, titled ''Don't Back Down on Russian Sanctions.'' I also refer to an article from Reuters, dated November 18, 2014, titled ''In murky Pentagon deal with Russia, big profit for a tiny Florida firm.''

On the record, I make this promise: If this language undermining the National Defense Authorization Act is not removed from the omnibus, I assure my colleagues that this issue will not go unaddressed in the fiscal year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. Up to this point, we have sought to manage this issue on an annual basis. We have always maintained that if a genuine crisis emerged, we would not compromise our national security interests in space. We have sought to be flexible and open to new information. But if this is how our efforts are repaid, then perhaps we need to look at a complete and indefinite restriction on Putin's rocket engine.

I take no pleasure in saying that. I believe that avoiding the year-over-year conflict over this matter between our authorizing and Appropriations Committees is in our Nation's best interests. Such back-and-forth only delays our shared desire to end our reliance on Russian technology from our space launch supply chain, while injecting instability into our national security space launch program.

That instability threatens the reliable launch of our most sensitive national security satellites and the stability of the fragile industrial base that supports them. But I cannot allow—I cannot allow the Appropriations Committee or any other Member of this body to craft a ''take it or leave it'' omnibus spending bill that allows a monopolistic corporation to do business with Russia's oligarchs to buy overpriced rocket engines that fund Russia's belligerence in Crimea and Ukraine, its support for Assad in Syria, and its neoimperial ambitions.

I would like to address this issue in a larger context. The way the Congress is supposed to work is that authorizing committees authorize, whether it be in domestic or international or, in this case, defense programs. The responsibility of the authorizing committee is to make sure, in the case of defense—the training, equipping, the authorizing, the funding, the policies—that all falls under the Armed Services Committee.

The Appropriations Committee is required in their responsibilities to decide the funding for these programs. It is within their authority to zero out a program if they do not think the funding is called for or necessary. They can add funding if they want to for various programs. But this—this is a complete violation, a complete and total violation.

This issue was raised in the subcommittee and addressed in the subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee. It was in the full committee. It was addressed on the floor where there were hundreds of amendments that were proposed. Yet what was decided by the Armed Services Committee remained intact until, in the dark of the night, until 10 or 11 or 12 or whatever time it was this morning, up pops a direct contradiction, a direct dismembering, a direct cancellation of a provision in the law where we are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars that have no bearing whatsoever on the authority and responsibility of the Appropriations Committee.

So there are two problems here: One, it was done in the dark of night—in the middle of the night. No one knew. Second of all, it is in direct violation of the relationship between the authorizing committees and the Appropriations Committee. So I say to my colleagues who are not on the Appropriations Committee: If you let this go, then maybe you are next. Maybe it is an amendment or a program that you have supported through debate and discussion and authorizing the committee and votes on amendments on the floor of the Senate. Then in the middle of the night, in December, when we are going out of session in 48 hours or so—or 72 hours—then up pops a provision that negates the entire work of the authorizing committee over days and weeks and months.

I say to my colleagues: You could be next. You could be next. That is why this in itself—subsidizing Vladimir Putin—is outrageous enough. But if we are going to allow this kind of middle-of-the-night airdropping, fundamental changes in programs and proposals and policies that have been debated in the open, that have been voted on in the open, completely negated, then we are destroying the very fundamental structure of how the Senate and the Congress are supposed to work.

I ask unanimous consent that a letter I sent to the chairman of the Appropriations Committee, dated November 19, 2015, be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, November 19, 2015.

Hon. THAD COCHRAN,
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN COCHRAN: As you finalize the appropriations bills for fiscal year 2016, I am concerned to hear that your Committee may be considering authorization language that would undermine sanctions on Russian rocket engines in connection with the Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle (EELV) program, as approved in the recently enacted Fiscal Year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on November 10, 2015, by a vote of 91–3. That provision, which was reviewed at length by the Armed Services Committee and subject to a fulsome amendment process on the Senate Floor, achieves a delicate balance that facilitates competition by allowing for nine Russian rocket engines to be used as the incumbent space launch provider transitions its launch vehicles to non-Russian propulsion systems.

I know you share my concerns about our continued use of Russian rocket engines in connection with military space launch and I ask you to respect the well-informed work my Committee took in crafting our legislation. Recent attempts by the incumbent contractor to manufacture a crisis by prematurely diminishing its stockpile of engines purchased prior to the Russian invasion of Crimea should be viewed with skepticism and scrutinized heavily. Such efforts should not be misconstrued as a compelling reason to undermine any sanctions on Russia while they occupy Crimea, destabilize Ukraine, bolster Assad in Syria, send weapons to Iran, and violate the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

We welcome your Committee's views and look forward to working with your Committee on ensuring that Department of Defense resources are not unwisely allocated to

benefit the Russian military industrial base or its beneficiaries. I believe avoiding the year-over-year re-litigation of this matter between our authorizing and appropriations committees is in our best interest, inasmuch as such back-and-forth only delay our shared desire to eliminate Russian technology from our space launch supply chain and injects instability into the EELV program—not conducive to its success in ensuring the reliable launch of our most sensitive national security satellites or the stability of the fragile industrial base that supports them.

Thank you for consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

JOHN MCCAIN,
Chairman.

Mr. MCCAIN. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. FRANKEN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

PARIS CLIMATE CHANGE AGREEMENT

Mr. FRANKEN. Madam President, I rise today to celebrate the successful climate negotiations that were just wrapped up in Paris.

This past Saturday, 196 countries came together to reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions, taking a very important step in the fight against climate change. This historic agreement is a recognition that we cannot afford to ignore the negative impacts of climate change and that we must work together globally to put the planet on a safer path forward.

The agreement does not simply take countries at their word, but it requires transparent measurement and verification to ensure that they live up to their promises. Crucially, the deal requires countries to revisit their emission reduction targets every 5 years. That way countries can factor in new technologies and new policies in order to keep global warming under 2 degrees Celsius.

This truly historic deal has been nearly 25 years in the making. International climate efforts date back to 1992, when governments around the world met in Rio de Janeiro with the objective of stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations. Nations have met every year since to further the goal. While some meetings have been more successful than others, most have been met with disappointment and lack of action. After all, climate change is a complex issue, and bringing about a consensus action for any international issue is no small feat. That is why this agreement is truly, truly impressive.

Two weeks ago I traveled to Paris with nine of my colleagues. We met with U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, with U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, and with our top U.S. climate change negotiator, Todd Stern. I congratulate all of them for their fine work.

Part of the purpose of our trip was to demonstrate to the world that there is a strong coalition in the U.S. Congress that supports the President's efforts on climate change, a message we conveyed to other nations, including Bangladesh. It is a country that has contributed little to industrial air pollution, but it is one of the most vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change. It is estimated that unless we act, rising sea level will inundate some 17 percent of Bangladesh, displacing about 18 million people in this low-lying nation. They will be uprooted and turned into climate refugees without a home.

But, of course, climate change isn't something that will just impact Bangladesh and other low-lying nations. It is already impacting us right here at home.

While we cannot attribute any single extreme weather event to climate change, we do know that climate change impacts the frequency, duration, and severity of extreme weather events. Just look at the damage caused by Superstorm Sandy. The storm surges caused by Sandy along the eastern seaboard were far more damaging because of climate-induced sea level rise. May I remind you that the damage caused by Sandy cost taxpayers $60 billion.

We are also seeing climate impacts to our forests. When Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell testified before the Senate energy committee a few years ago, he told us that throughout the country we are seeing far longer fire seasons and that wildfires are also larger and more intense. I asked Chief Tidwell whether scientists at the Forest Service have concluded that climate change has been exacerbating the intensity, the size, and duration of wildfires in the wildfire season. Without hesitation, he said yes. As a result, the Forest Service is spending more and more of their budget fighting fires—now more than half of their entire budget.

We are seeing more intense droughts. Unless we act, these droughts will have a major impact on food security around the world. That is why I recently penned an op-ed in the Minneapolis StarTribune with Dave MacLennan, the CEO of Cargill, the Nation's largest privately held corporation.

As the CEO of a company focused on agriculture, Dave is concerned about what climate change is going to do to our food supply in a world that is expected to go from 7 billion to 9.5 billion inhabitants by midcentury. That is why Cargill called for a strong outcome at the global climate negotiations.

So you can see that Cargill has a strong business case to make on why we have to deal with climate change. But, of course, that business case isn't just confined to the agriculture sector. Addressing climate change presents a tremendous opportunity to transform the energy sector.

For the very first time just this last week, Beijing issued its most severe warning to alert citizens of intense smog and local air pollution levels. Officials ordered half of the city's private vehicles to stay off the road, halted all operation at outdoor construction sites, and advised schools to temporarily close their doors. Citizens were encouraged to limit outdoor activities and recommended to wear a mask when outside.

China is choking on its own fumes from fossil fuels. As China and others recognize that they have to race toward clean energy, I want to make sure that our nation leads that race. I want to make sure that our startups are innovating tomorrow's solutions, that our companies are the ones that are developing and deploying clean energy technologies here and around the world. Again, I want to reiterate that. Addressing climate change head on would not only mitigate unprecedented damage to our economy but spur growth and innovation in a world that is hungry for advancements in clean energy.

My State of Minnesota recognized this opportunity in 2007 when it established a renewable energy standard and an energy efficiency standard. These kinds of policies send a strong signal to the private sector to develop and deploy clean energy solutions, and major investors are catching on to the opportunities. Just this month, Bill Gates launched the Breakthrough Energy Coalition to develop transformative energy solutions. The Coalition of nearly 30 billionaires from 10 different countries will invest in early stage energy companies to help them bridge the gap between government-funded lab research and the marketplace. According to Gates, the ''primary goal with the Coalition is as much to accelerate progress on clean energy as it is to make a profit.'' To back up this statement, Gates alone plans to invest $1 billion in clean energy in the next 5 years.

So you can see that the very serious threat of climate change presents a ''Sputnik moment'' for our Nation, an opportunity to rise to the challenge and defeat that threat. In response to Sputnik, we ended up not just winning the space race and sending a man to the Moon, but we did all sorts of great things for the American economy and for our society. We did it once, and we can do it again. By rising to the challenge of climate change, we will not just clean up our air but also drive innovation and create jobs—and not only in the clean energy sector—just as the space program created economic growth in so many economic sectors.

The Obama administration deserves a lot of credit for its leadership on climate change. Our domestic commitment through the Clean Power Plan, which builds on the work of my State and others, has established a Federal plan for reducing emissions. This important policy has provided American innovators and businesses the confidence to take on new risks and to drive new technologies forward.

After dragging our feet for so many years, I am proud that the United States is acting domestically and leading internationally.

But our job is not done. The agreement in Paris puts the planet on a safer trajectory than the one we have been on, but we have to remain vigilant and build upon that success. Internationally, we have to hold other nations accountable, ensure that they commit to stronger emission reduction targets over time, and make sure that those reductions are transparent and verifiable. Domestically, we have to build on the success of our cities and our States, and we have to work to make sure that the Clean Power Plan and other emissions reduction policies are effective. As a member of the Senate energy committee, I intend to do just that.

Two years ago, my first grandchild was born, and I am expecting my second grandchild in January. God willing, they will live through this century and into the next. I want them to know that when we had the opportunity to put Earth on a safer path, we seized the moment.

So let's celebrate this agreement because it is an important milestone, and then let's build on it to make the planet a safer and more habitable place for our grandchildren and their children.

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. BLUNT. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I am here today to talk a little about the bill we saw posted late last night—a bill that I think has better results than the process itself would have suggested we might have.

There is no question that we have to get back to the process of bringing these bills to the floor. Bring them to the floor one at a time and let everybody challenge every penny of spending, to spend it in a different way or don't spend it at all. I am disappointed, as every citizen in the country should be, that we didn't do it that way. I hope we have the opportunity next year to get back to where these bills are dealt with one at a time.

The other area I am disappointed in is the inability to use this bill to have the kinds of policy victories I would like to see. The rule on the waters of the United States—the courts consistently appear to be saying the EPA absolutely doesn't have the authority to do what they are trying to do. In my State, the fourth most dependent State on coal-powered utilities, the rule on electricity will double our utility bill sometime between now and 2030, and for some Missourians, their utility bill will more than double. There is the rule that makes it difficult for financial advisers to give advice to small investors and people with small savings, small retirement accounts. If this financial adviser's rule—the so-called fiduciary rule—is allowed to go into effect, it will have dramatic impact. The joint employer rule upends the franchise model of doing business—a model of doing business which is around the world now but is uniquely American in its capacity to bring people into the middle class and allow them to rise into the middle class.

So I am disappointed about all of those things. But when we look at the bill as a spending bill, when we look at the bill as a bill that is supposed to do what this bill does, which is to decide how to spend the country's money, there is a significant reprioritization here.

One of the things I have seen even more in recent years than I think used to be the case is that when so many of our friends in the House and the Senate—and maybe even more so in the Senate—talk about how important it is to fund our priorities, what they are really staying is that it is important to fund anything any of us are for. That is not the way to set priorities. The way to set priorities is to decide what is important for the government to do, decide what the government can do better than people can do for themselves or maybe couldn't possibly do for themselves, and then set those priorities. In that case, I think this bill makes significant steps in the right direction, with dramatic changes in areas that had been a problem for several years now, at least the last 5 or 6 years, and in the case I want to talk about first, the last dozen years, but nobody has been able to do anything about it. Nobody has ever said those aren't our priorities; they just said: Well, we have all of these priorities—which meant every line in the appropriations bill, the best I can tell.

Let's talk about the Labor-HHS bill. It is about 32 percent of all the money after defense. If I have any time, I might talk about the Defense bill because it does great things for veterans, great things for cyber security, great things that support those who serve, and one of those things is encouraging our allies on the frontlines in the War on Terror.

In Labor and Education and particularly in Health and Human Services, the National Institutes of Health, where so much of our health care research is generated—a little of it is done in every State. Some States have great institutions. Certainly Missouri does—the University of Missouri, Columbia, Washington University, Children's Hospital. Hospitals all over our State have unique opportunities to do research. Health care research is something that, frankly, just isn't going to happen the way it should happen unless the government steps forward and says: We are going to be a leader here.

From about 1996 until 2003, the Federal Government doubled NIH research—in less than a decade, doubled NIH research. Since 2003, there has been no increase. There has been no increase in over a decade. As that money didn't increase, the buying power of the money decreased. We can certainly argue there is somewhere in the neighborhood of 20 to 25 percent less buying power, so really in terms of what they are getting for research, there is less buying power by about 20 percent to 25 percent. Young researchers are frustrated at never getting that first grant, never getting the truly experimental grant to see if something will work that nobody may have thought of before.

This bill increases NIH research by almost 7 percent. It takes that $30 billion Federal commitment to research and makes it a $32 billion commitment. It begins the process of catching up. Why do we need to do that? What are the reasons we need to do that besides the fact that the government has done research of all kinds for a long time, from ag research, which I support, to health research, which I support? I can think right offhand of about three critical reasons we should be concerned about health research.

One is the individual impact that the failure to do this has had. As people live longer, more and more people die from Alzheimer's and its complications or cancer and its complications. Fewer people die from a heart attack because we have done great things there and can still do more through treatment and prevention to make heart attacks even less likely. But as people survive heart attack and stroke, they are more likely to die from Alzheimer's or cancer. This creates great stress for families, particularly Alzheimer's, which can create years and maybe decades of stress for families. So to try to prevent or postpone that, to work with families—I would say that is priority reason No. 1.

To save money for taxpayers would be priority reason No. 2. The projection is that by 2050, through Medicare, the Federal Government will be spending $1 trillion a year on Alzheimer's and Alzheimer's-related health care. That is about as big as this discretionary budget. I think this budget is about $1.15 trillion. So take all the money we are spending today on discretionary spending, and suddenly, in just a few decades, that is the same amount of money we will be spending because of Alzheimer's. So that is a good second reason.

A third reason is that health care is about to revolutionize everything from smart phone technology to the individual health care that is possible now that we know what we know about the human genome, the things we know about that make me as an individual different from everybody else and everybody else who is hearing this different from everybody else. What kind

of unique cure can we find? What kind of designer medicine cure can we find to solve a problem for you, and then how do we make that scalable so that, with minor variations, we can make the same thing possible and affordable for other people as well? And where that research is done—the smart phone technology applications, the focus on the brain, the focus on designer medicines—where that is done is likely to be where many of those jobs turn out to be. So certainly health care is and will continue to be a big economic driver. The multiplication of economic impact in a positive way with what we invest in health care is pretty dramatic. So that is a big increase.

Fighting opioid abuse—this is where people take prescription medicines. The Presiding Officer is a veteran, having just retired from her long military service. Many of those who serve are the most likely to have this problem because of injuries they sustained, accidents they were part of, attacks they were a victim of which create pain. So they take heavy amounts of appropriate things to ease that pain but then get addicted to it. This is an area people weren't talking about at all long ago, but deaths from prescription opioids have quadrupled since 1999—actually, more than that because they quadrupled between 1999 and 2013.

Overdose of prescription drugs costs the economy an estimated $20 billion in work loss and health care costs every single year. The lives of families are impacted when a successful person, a responsible person, or someone who has not achieved either of those things yet but is a loved part of your family, becomes a victim of opioid abuse. We have a commitment in this budget to $91 million. It is not the biggest line item in the budget, but it is almost three times what we have been spending.

Many of our Members have been real leaders in talking about this. Senator AYOTTE from New Hampshire, Senator PORTMAN from Ohio, and Senator SHAHEEN from New Hampshire are all very focused on this problem.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act benefits here as we move toward hopefully less Federal control on education but more ability to help local schools deal with people who have individual challenges.

Rural health is a big issue in my State and a big issue in the Presiding Officer's State. It is handled here in a different way.

Job training is an important thing we do.

But what do we not do here? This is my final addition to this: What are we not doing? We would have liked to have not funded over 40 programs, which was the bill that the Appropriations Committee sent to the floor months ago that was never debated. That would have been the chance to debate all 40 of those programs. I think there were 43 programs that cost about $2.5 billion. Debate all 43 of those programs and decide if the committee is right or not—we can't do that if we don't get it here on the floor. But we still eliminate 18 programs. Those programs currently were more than a quarter of a billion dollars of spending.

The President asked for 23 new programs that were $1.16 billion of spending that were not done in this bill.

The Independent Payment Advisory Board under ObamaCare, where there would be a board rather than you and your doctor who decided what your health care is going to look like—that is not funded, so that won't occur. And there won't be a big transfer from other accounts with some other label to insurance companies, because all of the expectations from ObamaCare have turned out not to produce the kinds of results its supporters thought it would.

Hopefully we have made a big difference in how we prioritize the spending of the people's money, of the taxpayers' money, and hopefully we have also made a renewed commitment to do this the right way. We have done it this way since, frankly, the control of the Senate changed half a dozen years ago. The new majority was totally committed to getting these bills to the floor. They were all ready—all 12 bills—for first time in 6 years, most of them ready about the end of May, the first of June, but with only a couple of exceptions were they allowed to come to the floor, and that was at the very last minute when it was too late for this process to work the way it should.

Let's hope for more transparency, more debate, and more challenges. I am chair of this one committee I have been talking about today, but certainly there have to be other ideas that other Members who aren't on this subcommittee have, who aren't on the Appropriations Committee have. They do their best to get those ideas in by talking, in this late process and during the year, about what should happen.

Let's do our best to make this happen the way the Constitution envisions and the way people have every right to expect. I hope for a better process but realize that this process does significantly change the priorities the Federal Government has been stuck with for the last 6 years and heads in a new direction.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

COMPETITIVE SPACE LAUNCH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the senior Senator from Arizona came to the floor this morning and raised a question about a provision in the Omnibus appropriations bill, particularly the aspect of it that related to the Department of Defense. During the course of raising the issue, the senior Senator from Arizona used my name on the floor repeatedly. It was refreshing and I am relieved. The senior Senator from Arizona has not attacked me on the floor for 3 weeks, and I was fearful he was feeling under the weather, but clearly he is in fine form and feels good, and I welcome him back to the floor for another attack on me personally.

Let's talk about the issue he raised because it is complicated but extremely important when it comes to the defense of the United States. Here is what it boils down to: In the early 2000s, there were two companies making rockets that launched satellites. The two companies were Boeing and Lockheed, and they competed with one another, but in the early 2000s—and I don't understand why—they made an argument to the Department of Defense that the Nation would be better off if they merged the two companies into one company and then provided the rockets to launch satellites to defend the United States and collect information. They argued that if they worked together, it would cost less, and they merged. With the approval of the Department of Defense, they continued to bid on satellite launches.

What happened was a good thing and a thing that was not so good. What was good was that their product was very reliable. They launched satellites with great reliability, and that is of course what America and its national defense requires. The bad part is that the costs went through the roof. The costs went up about 65 percent over this period of time since they created United Launch Alliance, costing the Federal taxpayers about $3 billion more for launches than it did in the past. They argued that they would eliminate competition and provide reliability, and they did, but the costs went up dramatically.

A new player arrived on the scene—SpaceX. SpaceX is associated with Elon Musk, a name that is well known in America. They decided to get into the business. They were going to build rockets and launch satellites too. Naturally, the United States of America said: Be my guest but prove you can do it in a way that we can count on you, because when we need a satellite launched to collect information, we want to make sure it is successful.

Over the years, SpaceX improved, evolved, and developed the capacity to launch satellites to the point where NASA, for example—the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—used SpaceX rockets successfully. It reached a point where the Department of Defense said to SpaceX: You are capable and will be certified to now compete for Department of Defense business. It is to the credit of SpaceX that they reached that point.

I thought this was an exciting development because, once again, we were going to have competition between the United Launch Alliance, the old Boeing-Lockheed merger, and SpaceX, the

new company. The owner of SpaceX said to me as well as publicly: We can do this for a fraction of the cost to American taxpayers. What I did was invite the CEOs of both companies to come to my subcommittee—when I then chaired the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee—in March of 2014. No one had quite seen a hearing like this before. We put the CEOs of both companies at the table at the same time, and we asked them questions about their operations, reliability, costs, and projections for the future.

At the end of this hearing, I said to the CEOs of each of these companies: I want to do something that is a little unusual. I want to offer each of you the opportunity, if you wish, to submit 10 questions to the other CEO that you think should have been asked and perhaps we didn't—and so they did. It was a complete record and a good one. For the first time, it really showed me that we were moving to a new stage in rocket science and capacity that could serve the United States by keeping us safe and keeping the costs down, and that of course should be our goal.

Then there was a complication. Vladimir Putin of Russia decided to take aggressive action by invading Georgia and Ukraine, and other actions by him that we considered confrontational tended to freeze up the relationship between the United States and Russia. Why is that important? It is important because the engine being used by United Launch Alliance to launch America's defense satellites was an engine built in Russia.

People started saying: Why in the world are we giving Russia and Vladimir Putin the opportunity to sell rocket engines to the United States? Secondly, why would we want to be dependent on Russia for rocket engines? So the debate started moving forward. How do we exclude the Russians from building engines and still have competition between these two companies? That is what brings me here today.

We were trying to find the right combination to bring competition and reliability without engaging the Russians. Everyone in Congress knows we have authorizing committees and appropriations committees. The senior Senator from Arizona is the chair of the defense authorizing committee, the Armed Services Committee, and I have been chair and am now the vice chair of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee.

The senior Senator from Arizona started including provisions in the authorizing bill which said that ULA, United Launch Alliance, could not use Russian engines to launch satellites and compete for business using those engines in the United States. As a result, the Air Force came to see me. First, I might add, a letter was sent when this provision was added to the Defense authorization bill. The letter was sent in May of this year, signed by Ash Carter, the Secretary of Defense, and James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, suggesting that excluding Russian engines so quickly could cause a problem in terms of the availability of missiles to launch satellites as we need them. The limitation that was put in by the defense authorization committee as to the number of engines that could be used would be quickly depleted, and the Air Force, the Department of Defense, and our intelligence agency said that may leave us vulnerable, so they asked the Senator from Arizona to reconsider that provision. He did not. If anything, the language that came out of conference on this provision made it even more difficult for the United Launch Alliance to consider using a different type of engine. I might add, they don't have an alternative engine to the Russian engine. United Launch Alliance uses it now. We told them to develop an American engine, and I stand behind that. They told us it will take anywhere from 5 to 7 years for that to happen.

I understand this is a complex assignment, and we want them to get it right. It seems like a long time, but it points to the dilemma we face. If United Launch Alliance cannot bid for work with the Department of Defense using a Russian engine, they don't have an alternative engine to bid with. At that point, SpaceX becomes the sole bidder and the monopoly source for engines. We tried to move from ULA as a monopoly source or sole bidder to competition, and now by injecting this prohibition against Russian engines beyond a certain number, we are again getting back to the days of a sole bidder.

What we have allowed in this Omnibus appropriations bill is language which gives 1 year of flexibility to the Department of Defense when it comes to bidding for these satellite launches, and of course it means United Launch Alliance will be using Russian engines for that bidding.

The Senator from Arizona came to the floor and spent most of his time talking about the aggression of Russia and Vladimir Putin and how we need to be strong with our response. Back in the day, when our relationship was more constructive, the Senator from Arizona and I actually traveled to Ukraine. I agree with him about the aggression of Russia and Mr. Putin and why the United States needs to be strong in response, but we have to be careful that we don't cut off our nose to spite our face. If we reach a point where we don't allow ULA to use a Russian engine to compete, we could endanger and jeopardize the opportunities the United States needs to keep us safe, and that is exactly what the Secretary of Defense and Mr. Clapper said in writing to Senator MCCAIN.

My message is that there is nothing, incidentally, in this omnibus bill that was not discussed in the original bill as marked up. There is no airdrop of language. It is a slightly different version of the language but says the same thing—that we think there should be some flexibility as ULA moves to develop their new engine.

The Department of Defense has convinced me that it would be shortsighted of us to make it impossible for ULA to even bid on future satellite launches. God forbid something happens to SpaceX where they can't launch satellites. At that point then, we would be in a terrible situation. We wouldn't be able to keep our country safe when we should. None of us wants that to happen.

The provision in the omnibus bill gives 1 year for the Department of Defense and the Air Force to continue to work with ULA to have a launch and have competitive bidding. If SpaceX performs as promised and comes in with a lower bid for those launches, they deserve to win, and they will. In the meantime, we want to make sure we have the availability of sourcing beyond just one company—beyond SpaceX.

I am impressed with all of these companies. The Senator from Arizona raised the point that Boeing has its headquarters in my home State, and I am very proud of that. I have worked with them in the past. I think it is an excellent company and does great work. My initial premise in starting this conversation in the Appropriations subcommittee was that we should have competition, and Boeing should face competition. The insertion of the Russian engine issue has made this more complex, and it will take us some time to reach what should be our ultimate goal: quality and reliable engines in these rockets to launch satellites to keep America safe and the certainty that if one company fails to be able to meet our defense needs, there is an alternative supplier. That, to me, is the best outcome possible.

This section 8045 of the Department of Defense appropriations is critical to our national security and launching satellites into space. We have to assure the Department of Defense and our intelligence agencies that we can put critical satellites into orbit when we need it. We have to make certain that the costs of these launches is competitive so taxpayers end up getting the best outcome for the dollars they put into our national defense. We have to generate competition to drive down costs, and we have to bring to an end our reliance on Russian-manufactured rocket engines. I wish that were not the case. I wish our relationship with Russia was positive in every aspect, but it is not, and I join with virtually all of my colleagues in believing that the sooner we move away from Russian-made engines to American-made engines in competition, the better for us and the better for our Nation.

There is no doubt that our Omnibus appropriations bill recognizes the need to end our reliance on Russian engines, and we actually put our money where our mouth is. We added $143.6 million on top of the $84.4 million requested by the President to accelerate the development of a new rocket engine. This amount is $43.6 million more than the

$100 million authorized by the defense authorization committee, so we are making certain we are going to end this reliance on Russian engines. The question is how we manage the space launch through the several years of launches before we have that engine. We need to do it without jeopardizing our national security.

The general provision I referred to allows for space launch competition in 2016 without regard to the source of an engine. It will permit real competition on four missions in 2016, and it will avoid trading one monopoly for another. I think I have explained how we have reached this point.

I think there is good faith on both sides. I don't question the motives of the senior Senator from Arizona. I hope he doesn't question mine. What we need to make certain of is that we move toward a day when America is safe and that the money spent by taxpayers is well spent.

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

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

NASA'S BUDGET

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, we are going back into space with Americans on American rockets, and we are going to Mars. We are on the cusp of the next big breakthrough in space exploration.

It is interesting that this is at the very time that in our culture here on Earth, the movie that is harkening back—''Star Wars''—is coming out again, and it is going to be such a blockbuster at the box office. What is fictional in ''Star Trek'' and ''Star Wars'' is now becoming factual.

In large part, it is what has been done in the Nation's space program since the shutdown of the space shuttle back in 2011 and in the preparation of the new vehicles—the new rockets, the new spacecraft, the new satellites, the new exploratory missions that have gone on.

Who among us, merely three decades ago, would have thought the Hubble Space Telescope would look back into the far reaches of the universe—close to the beginning of that universe—and start to unlock secrets through this telescope that is orbiting the Earth that was put up by humans in the U.S. space shuttle? Who among us would believe that we now are going to launch a telescope in 2018 that will look back in time to the very beginning of the source of light in the universe—the big bang—and understand this universe all the more and how it evolved in this magnificent creation that we earthlings observe of the heavens? Who among us, over four decades ago when we landed on the Moon, were not impatient to escape the bounds of Earth's gravity once again to get out and explore the heavens?

That is now becoming a reality. It is becoming a reality in large part because of the budget that will be presented to the Congress, which we will pass—an appropriation that just in this present fiscal year that we find ourselves in right now will increase NASA's budget $1.3 billion over what NASA was appropriated last year. Getting Americans and American rockets back into space, since we haven't had Americans on American rockets since we shut down the space shuttle, had to be done. That was an essentially extraordinary creative flying machine, but its design had inherent flaws that were risky for human beings. Indeed, in over 135 flights of the space shuttle, we lost two crews—14 souls—because of its design. There was a malfunction where there was no escaping for the crew. But now we have new rockets that will have the crew in a capsule on the top of the rocket so that if there is an explosion on the pad, an explosion in ascent all the way into orbit, we can still save the crew because we can separate them by the escape rockets from the main vehicle and save the crew, ultimately having them land or by parachute—powered landing or a parachute landing.

These rockets are almost ready to fly. Indeed, some of them have been flying for quite a while. Two companies, SpaceX and Boeing, will have the spacecraft. SpaceX, its capsule and spacecraft called Dragon, is sitting on top of a rocket that has flown many times called the Falcon 9. Boeing, with a spacecraft called the Starliner, will sit upon the very proven Atlas V. Which one will fly first? We do not know. But the fact is that is only 2 years away—2017. They will fly with the first crews to and from the space station so that we no longer have to rely upon a very reliable partner that indeed helped us build the International Space Station to which we go and return not only with crew but with cargo as well. We won't have to rely on the Soyuz anymore. We will be flying on American rockets. That is going to happen in a short 2 years.

The assurance of that is this. It is the Omnibus appropriations bill that is coming forth that has appropriated the amount NASA needs to keep this competition between SpaceX and Boeing going for developing, hopefully, two spacecraft that will be launching Americans on American rockets to and from our International Space Station.

By the way, we have six human beings on the space station. It is an international crew. They are doing all kinds of experiments. At another time and another day, I can tell my colleagues about some of those exciting things.

We are going to Mars. We are going to Mars because we are developing a spacecraft called *Orion* that we have already test-flown out to 3,600 miles to check its structural integrity on a ballistic reentry. That was done a year ago. Now we are building the largest, most powerful rocket ever on Earth, called the Space Launch System, or SLS. *Orion* and SLS have also been given a boost in this appropriations bill. So we are well on our way for the first test of this full-up rocket with capsule in September of 2018. That is less than 3 years away, with the first crewed vehicle after the first test in 2021.

That is the forerunner to building the spacecraft and the technologies that can take human beings and keep them alive all the way from Earth to Mars, land on Mars, stay on Mars for a while, and return safely to the Earth. ''Star Wars,'' ''Star Trek,'' is fiction. It is exciting, but it's fiction. This is space fact. It is happening in front of our eyes.

Now, there are other things that are happening with this appropriations bill. We think, in this solar system, if there is a chance for life besides Mars, or life that was there and we want to know what happened—there is a moon around Jupiter called Europa. Europa is so cold that it has an exterior that is ice. But the gravitational pull of Jupiter, as Europa goes around and around Jupiter, is such that it causes the friction from an inner core that already has heat and heats up from the inside. So under this crust of ice on Europa is water. In our experience as earthlings, wherever we have found water, we have found life. So is not Europa one of the best chances of there being life as we understand it in those oceans? It is a smaller body than Earth—Europa—and yet has oceans that are twice the volume of the oceans on planet Earth. That is a real possibility.

So in this appropriations bill, there is $1.6 billion to proceed on a plan for taking us to Europa to see if there is other life in our solar system.

There is also something that is very important to us earthlings, and that is that we need to know what is happening to the planet and we need to be able to predict and we need to be able to foretell, because if a big storm is coming here, we want precise measurements to let us, bound on the face of terra firma, know what is that storm that is coming and what are the weather conditions. That accuracy is so important for us in our daily lives here on Earth, not even to speak of our national security.

You could go through the rest of the NASA budget and you can see that it indeed sets us on a course for extraordinary space exploration as well as taking care of the aeronautical research, which is the other ''A'' in NASA—aeronautics. That has a plus-up from the President's request—aeronautics—giving all the research on the technology to make sure that our aviation industry is at the absolute cutting edge.

We are going to Mars, and we are beginning this journey as we did with the

test of the spacecraft a year ago. That journey is going to accelerate, and in the lifetimes of many of those within the sound of my voice, they will witness a human crew of Americans and possibly an international crew that will go all the way to the planet Mars and return. Indeed what was science fiction based on science facts—the Matt Damon movie ''The Martian''—really is right within our grasp. It is an exciting time as we bring our space exploration back to life so that the American people can see that there is a viable space program and that we have a goal and that goal is the planet Mars.

COAST GUARD LEGISLATION

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I want to take advantage of this opportunity to also share with the Senate that we have a very important Coast Guard bill on which we are going to try to get unanimous consent so that we can send it on to the House. There are parts that have been controversial and those parts generally have been worked out. There are one or two others.

This Senator thinks the American people—unless they get in trouble out on the high seas—don't really have an understanding of what a professional military organization the U.S. Coast Guard is. We have the Coast Guard participating with our Defense Department over in the war zones—the area of responsibility over in Central Command. We have the Coast Guard basically doing the job for the U.S. Navy in the waters off of Alaska. We have a Coast Guard that is patrolling the waters off of the continental United States, as well as the island State of Hawaii. The Coast Guard is always there when Americans get in trouble, and indeed when mariners who are not Americans get into trouble. The Coast Guard is an incredible professional organization that is doing the job.

Down in the waters off of my State of Florida, the Coast Guard does this incredible job working with the U.S. Navy on the interdiction of drugs. When the drug smugglers have to be interdicted, the Navy, if they are tracking them, hands that over to the Coast Guard because the Coast Guard, in fact, has the law enforcement capability to go in and take down the smugglers.

The Coast Guard can shoot the motors out of these go-fast boats to interdict smugglers—even going after submerged vehicles—to stop them. The Coast Guard does that from not only their boats but also from the air. The Coast Guard stands tall. We in the Congress now need to stand tall for the Coast Guard.

Earlier this month the majority leader offered a unanimous consent to discharge from the Senate commerce committee and pass the Coast Guard Authorization Act, giving the Coast Guard the resources it needs to carry out its mission. It cannot be overstated.

It is a small, very agile service of 42,000 Active-Duty members. It plays a vital role in protecting the Nation from narcoterrorism, human smuggling, environmental disasters, and from the loss of life and property at sea.

So what is in this bill? It is the result of several months of negotiations between the House and the Senate. The chairman of our Senate commerce committee, JOHN THUNE, and I, as the ranking member of the commerce committee, have worked with our colleagues to craft a bill that will authorize a total of $9.1 billion in each of the fiscal years 2016 and 2017. It is a $380 million per year increase over the amount authorized last year, and it enhances the Coast Guard and its capability to do a number of the things that I have listed, which include cracking down on the drug trade and the destruction of evidence, including the destruction of illegal drugs. It enhances the Coast Guard capabilities to stop the smuggling of drug money across our maritime borders. The Coast Guard's Western Hemisphere strategy is to combat the criminal networks, secure the borders, and safeguard American commerce. So to meet all that, this legislation's increased funding is going to support the Coast Guard's ongoing fleet recapitalization program, including the design and construction of a new offshore patrol cutter and continued production of a fast response cutter.

I have ridden in these fast response cutters. I have ridden in the go-fast boats as they simulated a drug smuggler that was trying to avoid us. This boat can do the hairpin turns and the sudden 180-degree turns at top speed, and that is how these guys can't get away. If for some reason they were not able to interdict them at sea, we have them from the air.

I have watched the Coast Guard sharpshooters blow out the motors on a go-fast drug smuggling boat. But we have to recapitalize a lot of these old boats. The average age of a Coast Guard high endurance cutter is 45 years old. The average age of the Coast Guard's 210-foot medium endurance cutter is 48 years old. These are two of the primary ships that are used for interdiction and rescue worldwide. So new offshore patrol cutters, fast response cutters, will give our Coast Guard an effective coastal and offshore interdiction capability in order to meet its objectives.

You think of the Coast Guard off the coast. They are in Washington. I am not talking about the ones onshore. They are out there protecting national security assets in and around the Potomac and the Anacostia Rivers.

In addition to this recapitalization, the bill allows the Coast Guard to begin updating its fleet of polar icebreakers, allowing the service to pay an estimated $1 billion needed for the acquisition of a new state-of-the-art heavy polar icebreaker. Why do we need that?

Have you noticed recently what the Chinese have been doing in the Arctic? Especially, have you noticed what the Russians are doing in the Arctic? Have you noticed that the Russians have 19 icebreakers and we have just a few? Have you noticed that China is funding and building icebreakers for the Arctic?

Part of our icebreakers, the Polar Star and the Healy were built in the 1970s and 1990s. The Polar Star is now well beyond its intended 30-year service life. It is vital that we enable the Coast Guard to begin bringing these new vessels online to support the Coast Guard's Arctic strategy and cooperative maritime strategy and to meet the President's stated intent for increased American presence and capabilities in the Arctic.

I went with the Coast Guard to Alaska. As I said a moment ago, the Navy has really ceded the Alaskan waters to the Coast Guard to protect maritime shipping—a huge fishing fleet up there. But also on the North Slope of Alaska, which is the beginning of those Arctic waters, there is a lot of activity up there—not only fishing but exploring for oil. At times of the year when it is totally incapable of a seaworthy vessel to crack the ice, you have to have an icebreaker to do it. The Russians have 19. They are getting very aggressive in the Arctic. Just ask the Prime Minister of Norway, with all of his teams, how concerned they are with what the former Soviets are doing up in the Arctic. Thus, this bill enhances and speeds up our capability of getting another icebreaker—a modernized icebreaker.

So this legislation is also going to provide the Coast Guard parity with our Department of Defense sister services with respect to personnel policies such as parental leave and eligibility for combat-related special compensation. If they are out there on the frontlines, they should have parity with our sister men and women in uniform.

This legislation will ensure that the Coast Guard is properly equipped to protect our national and homeland security interests in our ports, on our coastal and inland waters, such as Washington, and on the high seas around the world.

This Senator believes that we will be able to do this by unanimous consent, if we work through a few more things. So I urge our colleagues in the Senate: Let's get this up and get it passed before the Christmas recess so the House will have it the first part of next year so we can get on about the process of getting this bill authorized, completed, and sent down to the President for signature into law.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT). The Senator from Pennsylvania.

ERIC WILLIAMS CORRECTIONAL OFFICER PROTECTION ACT OF 2015

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I am going make a unanimous consent request, but first I want to say a few words about the legislation about which the request pertains. I want to thank my colleague Senator BOB CASEY for joining me on this.

It was back in 2014 that Senator CASEY and I introduced the Eric Williams Correctional Officer Protection Act. It is a bipartisan bill, and it is a simple idea. The idea is to better enable these men and women who protect us every day by working as corrections officers—to better enable them to protect themselves in the very dangerous environments in which they go to work every day.

Amazingly enough, under the Bureau of Prisons policy, prison guards are often placed on duty, guarding large numbers of inmates by themselves, unarmed, and with no meaningful way to defend themselves. Officer Eric Williams of Wayne County, PA, paid the price for this policy. In February of 2013, Eric Williams was working alone in a housing unit of a Federal prison, a unit of 125 inmates. Carrying only a radio, handcuffs, and a set of keys, he had no means of self-defense and no one with him to provide back-up. A gang member serving a life sentence for first-degree murder savagely attacked and killed Officer Williams. The inmate used a homemade weapon to stab Eric Williams 129 times. He beat Eric so badly that his skull was crushed. The damage was so severe that Eric Williams' father stated: ''I didn't even recognize my boy laying in that casket.'' Eric was just 34 years old.

This Bureau of Prisons policy is very misguided. We send our law enforcement officers alone, without defensive gear, to guard large numbers that include convicted killers. So, working with Senator CASEY and with Eric Williams' parents, Don and Jean Williams, we introduced the Eric Williams Correctional Officer Protection Act. I should point out that Don and Jean Williams have been absolutely heroic advocates in insisting that correctional officers have this tool at their disposal.

This is a bill that would require the Bureau of Prisons to issue nonlethal pepper spray to guards at high- and medium-security prisons so that these guards will have some means to protect themselves, some means of self-defense. We know this works. We know this works because there are many, many documented cases where a violent attack is immediately ended by deploying pepper spray. The fact is, pepper spray completely and immediately incapacitates an attacker. It does so while doing no permanent damage.

Well, it is too late for Eric Williams, but there are thousands of correctional officers across America who are working in dangerous environments every day. If we pass this legislation, we are probably going to save some of their lives over time.

The bill is bipartisan, as I pointed out. It has been endorsed by the American Federation of Government Employees, by the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, by the Council of Prisons Local 33. I am pleased to announce that thanks to the concerted and, as I said, heroic efforts of Eric's parents, Don and Jean Williams, and many law enforcement and correction officers across the country, I believe that today the Senate is ready to enact this legislation.

I also thank my cosponsors, Senators MANCHIN, MCCONNELL, CORNYN, INHOFE, CAPITO, LANKFORD, KIRK, and VITTER.

Before I make the formal unanimous consent request, I yield to the senior Senator from Pennsylvania who has joined me in this effort, Mr. CASEY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator TOOMEY for his work on this legislation—our work together. As Senator TOOMEY did, I especially want to commend Don and Jean Williams, the parents of corrections officer Eric Williams. I will not reiterate the horrific nature of his death; Senator TOOMEY outlined that. I cannot imagine more of a nightmare for a corrections officer and for his or her family.

We can bring some measure of protection to these officers by making sure that every possible circumstance is one in which the officer has pepper spray to be able to prevent an attack or to slow an attack down enough until that corrections officer gets help.

I want to say how much we appreciate the fact that this is bipartisan. This is one of those issues that should not have any kind of political division. Senator TOOMEY outlined the challenge and also the solution for this problem.

This is not a guarantee, but it means that if a corrections officer—and they are always outnumbered, by the way. If they are outnumbered, they will have some measure of protection.

I want to emphasize one thing I certainly forgot about or maybe never fully understood until I was in a line at corrections officer Eric Williams' viewing before his funeral. The line was full of law enforcement officers. I think sometimes we forget—and it was made clear to me that night—that these individuals are part of law enforcement, just like police officers at the local level or State police officers or other law enforcement personnel. When you work in a Federal prison and you are a corrections officer, you are part of law enforcement.

Those of us who work hard to provide resources for law enforcement should once again support legislation like this. I want to thank Senator TOOMEY for his work. I want to thank those who made this possible. I hope we can have this legislation pass through the Senate before we leave by the end of this week.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, again, I want to thank Senator CASEY for his excellent work on this. At this time, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration of S. 238 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

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

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 238) to amend title 18, United States Code, to authorize the Director of the Bureau of Prisons to issue oleoresin capsicum spray to officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The bill (S. 238) was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed, as follows:

S. 238

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Eric Williams Correctional Officer Protection Act of 2015''.

SEC. 2. OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES OF THE BUREAU OF PRISONS AUTHORIZED TO CARRY OLEORESIN CAPSICUM SPRAY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 303 of part III of title 18, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

''§ 4049. Officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons authorized to carry oleoresin capsicum spray

''(a) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the Bureau of Prisons shall issue, on a routine basis, oleoresin capsicum spray to—

''(1) any officer or employee of the Bureau of Prisons who—

''(A) is employed in a prison that is not a minimum or low security prison; and

''(B) may respond to an emergency situation in such a prison; and

''(2) to such additional officers and employees of prisons as the Director determines appropriate, in accordance with this section.

''(b) TRAINING REQUIREMENT.—

''(1) IN GENERAL.—In order for an officer or employee of the Bureau of Prisons, including a correctional officer, to be eligible to receive and carry oleoresin capsicum spray pursuant to this section, the officer or employee shall complete a training course before being issued such spray, and annually thereafter, on the use of oleoresin capsicum spray.

''(2) TRANSFERABILITY OF TRAINING.—An officer or employee of the Bureau of Prisons who completes a training course pursuant to paragraph (1) and subsequently transfers to employment at a different prison, shall not be required to complete an additional training course solely due such transfer.

''(3) TRAINING CONDUCTED DURING REGULAR EMPLOYMENT.—An officer or employee of the Bureau of Prisons who completes a training course required under paragraph (1) shall do so during the course of that officer or employee's regular employment, and shall be compensated at the same rate that the officer or employee would be compensated for

conducting the officer or employee's regular duties.

''(c) USE OF OLEORESIN CAPSICUM SPRAY.—Officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons issued oleoresin capsicum spray pursuant to subsection (a) may use such spray to reduce acts of violence—

''(1) committed by prisoners against themselves, other prisoners, prison visitors, and officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons; and

''(2) committed by prison visitors against themselves, prisoners, other visitors, and officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons.''.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections for chapter 303 of part III of title 18, United States Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 4048 the following:

''4049. Officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons authorized to carry oleoresin capsicum spray.''.

SEC. 3. GAO REPORT.

Not later than the date that is 3 years after the date on which the Director of the Bureau of Prisons begins to issue oleoresin capsicum spray to officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons pursuant to section 4049 of title 18, United States Code, as added by this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to Congress a report that includes the following:

(1) An evaluation of the effectiveness of issuing oleoresin capsicum spray to officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons in prisons that are not minimum or low security prisons on—

(A) reducing crime in such prisons; and

(B) reducing acts of violence committed by prisoners against themselves, other prisoners, prison visitors, and officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons in such prisons.

(2) An evaluation of the advisability of issuing oleoresin capsicum spray to officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons in prisons that are minimum or low security prisons, including—

(A) the effectiveness that issuing such spray in such prisons would have on reducing acts of violence committed by prisoners against themselves, other prisoners, prison visitors, and officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons in such prisons; and

(B) the cost of issuing such spray in such prisons.

(3) Recommendations to improve the safety of officers and employees of the Bureau of Prisons in prisons.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

HIGHER EDUCATION EXTENSION ACT OF 2015

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to enter into a colloquy with Senators AYOTTE, BALDWIN, CASEY, and PORTMAN.

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

Mr. ALEXANDER. If it is agreeable to Senators, I will make a few remarks introducing the subject of the colloquy, and then the Senators will speak in that order. I am here today to talk about the Federal Perkins Loan Program Extension Act of 2015, which is a substitute to H.R. 3594. I have a bill which has been taken to the desk.

The original sponsors of the bill, which I will ask to be considered at the conclusion of the colloquy, are Senators AYOTTE, BALDWIN, JOHNSON, CASEY, COCHRAN, BOOZMAN, and me. We have debated the Perkins loan several times on the floor of the Senate. Twice, I have objected to the House bill to extend the Perkins Loan Program. This is a program that was set to expire in 2012, since the 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

That date was not extended the last time we reauthorized the Higher Education Act. This is a program that, in 1998, the Congress and the President decided would expire in 2012. The expiration of the loan program should not have been a surprise to anybody. It has not received appropriations since 2004.

The Department of Education reminded institutions that the program was expiring earlier this year. I objected to the extension on the grounds that the current Federal loan program—one that all students, not select students, are able to use—has a lower interest late and better repayment options than the Perkins Loan Program. I objected because I believed there should only be one Federal loan program for undergraduate students, as well as one for graduate students, and one for parents.

That was the testimony we received in our education committee, the HELP Committee. Senator BENNET and I and a bipartisan group of Senators have introduced something called the FAST Act, which would, in a variety of ways, simplify the ability of students to apply for Federal student aid. One of those ways is to simplify the maze of student loans that are available to students today.

Sometimes students end up with more loans than they even know they have. Then they have trouble paying them back. However, in recent weeks, I have had many conversations with Senators. Some of them are on the floor today and are Members of this colloquy, who have suggested to me they would like to have the Perkins Loan Program extended until we can address it in the Higher Education Reauthorization Act.

Senator AYOTTE, Senator BALDWIN, Senator COLLINS, Senator CASEY, Senator JOHNSON, Senator PORTMAN, and Senator BLUMENTHAL are some of the Senators who have eloquently made that case on the floor of the Senate. They came and argued the merits of the Perkins Loan Program. Most of the arguments relied on the use of these loans by students to provide for financing up to a student's full cost of attendance to meet a gap in funding that is above their direct Federal loan limits for the very neediest students; or they argued it was an important resource to students in urgent circumstances such as when a student's parent loses a job.

I listened to these Senators. I have listened to university presidents and others who have talked with me about it. As a result, today I come here with what I believe is a fair compromise, cosponsored by the Senators that I mentioned, to address the specific issues raised.

We propose a 2-year extension of the Perkins Loan Program while we work on a long-term solution for simplifying the student aid program. This extension will give us time to move forward on the Higher Education Act reauthorization next year, and come to a consensus on how to simplify the Federal student aid program, which has become so complicated that many students will not even apply for loans, and many of those who do don't realize the opportunities they have to pay the loans back according to very generous terms.

That being said, I think it is important for me to say that I am still, frankly, skeptical of the merits of this duplicative loan program, which only serves 5 percent of all student loan borrowers and amounts to a little over one-half of 1 percent of all the outstanding federal student loans we have in the country today. The program provides an average loan of about $2,000 and illustrates the complicated mess our student loan system is in today.

My colleagues, cosponsors, and I have worked on this compromise to extend the Perkins Loan Program for 2 years for all eligible undergraduates and 1 year for current graduate students who have already received a Perkins loan for the graduate degree they are pursuing.

This is what the substitute does. It extends the Perkins Loan Program until September 30, 2017, for all eligible undergraduates. It provides 1 year of additional Perkins loans to graduate students who have already received a Perkins loan.

Under the Direct Grad PLUS Loan Program, graduate students have the ability to borrow up to the cost of attendance annually and have no aggregate or lifetime loan limits. In other words, you don't need the Perkins loan as a graduate student to meet costs because you can get as much money as you would need under the regular direct loan system.

The bill requires that the institutions award the maximum annual limit of subsidized direct loans prior to awarding a Perkins loan for current undergraduate Perkins loan borrowers.

It requires that institutions award the maximum annual limit of both subsidized and unsubsidized direct loans prior to awarding a Perkins loan for new undergraduate Perkins loan borrowers.

It requires the institution to disclose to Perkins loan borrowers the following: that the program is ending; next, that this loan is not eligible for certain repayment and forgiveness benefits available to borrowers utilizing the Direct Loan Program.

For an undergraduate, the interest rate is lower in the Direct Loan Program and they have a more generous way to repay the loan than under the

Perkins loan. We want the Perkins loan borrowers to know that.

We want them to know they may consolidate their Perkins loan into a Federal direct loan to receive the benefits of the Direct Loan Program; that is, the more generous repayment terms.

We want them to know that Federal direct loans and Perkins loans have different interest rates.

We want them to know that if they are receiving a Perkins loan as an undergraduate today and they have received one in the past, that their institution has already awarded all subsidized Federal direct loans for which they may be eligible for that year. In other words, the Perkins loan is their second loan.

Many students borrow more than they should and then have trouble paying it back. We want them to know that if they are receiving a Perkins loan for the first time, their institution has already awarded all subsidized and unsubsidized Federal direct loans for which they were eligible that year and that this is their third loan.

If this whole Federal student aid system sounds complicated, it is.

There are millions of students across our country who take advantage of generous Federal grants and loans—more than $30 billion in grants that they don't have to pay back every year. There is a total outstanding debt of federal student loans of $1.2 trillion, almost $100 billion in new loans every year. However, it is such a maze and so complicated that many students don't understand how much they are borrowing. So that was my purpose in objecting to an automatic extension of the Perkins loan without thinking about it in terms of how we simplify it and make it easier for students to understand the tangled maze of loans in the Federal student aid system.

I thank my colleagues who are here today for being so eloquent and so aggressive in pointing out the benefits of the Perkins Loan Program and for coming up with the suggestion that we find a fair compromise so that over the next 2 years the Perkins Loan Program will continue but that during that time, both our education committee and the full Senate and the House will have a chance to review and make simpler the Federal system of grants and loans for students who attend our 6,000 colleges and universities in the country.

At this point, I recognize Senator AYOTTE of New Hampshire, who was one of the first to come to the floor and very persuasively argue about the importance of some continuation of the Perkins Loan Program.

Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Tennessee. The Perkins loan is a very important loan program to people in New Hampshire and to 5,000 students in New Hampshire who are current recipients.

While I know my colleagues who are on the floor who have fought so hard for this—Senator BALDWIN, Senator CASEY, and Senator PORTMAN—would have preferred that the Senate take up and pass the House's Higher Education Extension Act prior to Perkins expiring, because all of us were on the floor on September 29 as well, I do very much appreciate the spirit of compromise that the Senator from Tennessee has shown in working with us to extend this very important loan program for 2 years, and I thank him for that and for not letting this expire.

I thank my colleagues on the floor who have fought so hard for the students in their States who, like the students in New Hampshire, the 5,000 students who received a Perkins loan during the last academic year—this is very important to those students. I have heard from them, the colleges, universities, and financial aid administrators in New Hampshire, who have urged that it is very important, especially before we end the year with the Perkins Loan Program expired, that we pass this extension.

Certainly I look forward to continuing to work to make sure that all of our student loan programs are easier for people to use; that they are simpler; and that we make sure young people in this country and those who are returning to education as well—perhaps in a change of career or a new course in their life—that they get the opportunity, no matter where they come from or their economic background, to reach their full potential in this country because that is the essence of the American dream.

Again, this program is very important to my home State. This program is also important to half a million students across the country. It hits a lot of students.

Unfortunately, in my home State of New Hampshire, we have the distinction of having the highest average student loan debt in the country. So every bit helps students. These 5,000 students in New Hampshire—I want them to know this program will continue, and I want to make sure the people of New Hampshire understand that I am going to continue to fight for access for all of our students in New Hampshire and those who want to have better educational opportunities to better their lives and reach their full potential.

I thank the Senator from Tennessee, and certainly I thank the other Senators who are on the floor on a bipartisan basis who fought so hard for the Perkins loan extension.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from New Hampshire. She has been a passionate advocate for the Perkins loan recipients in New Hampshire and across this country and played a major role in developing this 2-year compromise that permits us to continue the program while we look at the future.

Senator BALDWIN of Wisconsin was one of the first on the floor to point out the importance of passing the House bill and dealing with this issue. She is a member of the Senate's education committee, what we call the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. Both she and her colleague from Wisconsin, Senator JOHNSON, have vigorously advocated for an extension of the Perkins Loan Program. I thank Senator BALDWIN for her hard work and look forward to working with her not just on passing this bill but working in the committee to come to a proper resolution on student aid.

Ms. BALDWIN. I thank the chairman for this colloquy and for the moment at which we have now arrived.

Mr. President, I rise to speak about the Perkins Loan Program—a vital investment in students that has been successful in helping Americans access affordable higher education and pursue their dreams.

Due to Senate inaction, the Perkins Loan Program lapsed at the end of September. I have twice come to the floor to urge my colleagues to take action and extend this critical student loan program which has helped literally millions of America's low-income students for more than half a century.

I am proud to have earned the support of a strong bipartisan majority in the Senate to continue this investment. Since the program's expiration, a growing chorus of advocates, students, and colleges and universities have joined our bipartisan coalition in calling on the Senate to act.

As has been well documented, my friend Chairman ALEXANDER and I have had our differences on this issue. As he just shared, he has objected to my previous efforts to revive the Perkins Loan Program due to his concerns with the program that he wanted to address as a part of the discussion about reauthorizing the Higher Education Act—a discussion, by the way, I very much look forward to. But despite his prior objections, I have certainly remained firm in the belief that we must act now to help students, even as we look toward that future conversation on higher education starting at the education committee and then proceeding through the Congress.

I continue to work with my Republican colleagues and Democratic colleagues—especially those Republican colleagues who had concerns with the program—in order to find an interim path forward.

I am so pleased that we are here today with a bipartisan compromise that provides a 2-year extension of the Perkins Loan Program. The compromise before us today is not perfect, and this is not the legislation I would have written on my own. However, today we have found a bipartisan solution that breaks the gridlock and will revive the Perkins Loan Program, providing critical support to students across America who were left in the lurch when the program expired this fall.

This extension provides current and new undergraduate borrowers with access to Perkins loans through September 30 of the year 2017, allowing

them to complete both the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 academic years with the support of this important program. In addition, it provides current graduate students with a Perkins loan an additional year of eligibility through September 30, 2016, allowing them to complete the 2016–2017 academic year with the support of Perkins. Like the 1-year extension measure which the House adopted by voice vote earlier this fall, this 2-year extension is fully paid for.

I thank Chairman ALEXANDER for working with me and Ranking Member MURRAY to address his concerns and to reach this compromise which we expect the Senate to pass in short order.

I also thank my strong allies in this fight: Senator MURRAY, Senator CASEY, Senator PORTMAN, Senator AYOTTE, Senator COLLINS, and many other supporters of the Perkins Loan Program in the Senate.

I also thank our partners on the House Education and the Workforce Committee, Chairman KLINE and Ranking Member SCOTT, who supported extending the Perkins Program. I am hopeful they will push this legislation across the finish line before Congress leaves for the year.

Since 1958, the Federal Perkins Loan Program has been successfully helping Americans access affordable higher education with low-interest loans for students who cannot borrow or afford more expensive private student loans.

In Wisconsin, the program provides more than 20,000 low-income students with more than $41 million in aid, students such as Andrew, a current student at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point campus. Without the support of his Perkins loan, Andrew said he would not have had the means to attend college with the little to no income at his disposal. Today, not only is Andrew making the dean's list every semester, but he also has his sights set on attending the law school at the University of Wisconsin. Andrew said: ''Without the assistance I get from the Perkins Loan I would be forced to either take out other high-interest loans, delay my graduation rate, or drop out—which is the last thing I want to do.''

I am pleased that we have reached an agreement to extend this program for 2 years to help students just like Andrew. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the HELP Committee to ensure that campus-based programs like Perkins are a part of the future of Federal support for higher education.

Again, I thank the chairman for his colloquy and his hard work on reaching this resolution for the moment and look forward to the larger debate in the Education Committee when we reconvene next year.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Wisconsin. This is the second time in 2 weeks that she has played a role in an important bipartisan decision on the floor of the Senate regarding education. She has made a major contribution to our Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and through her willingness to work in a bipartisan way with other Senators who she mentioned, we have been able to get a bipartisan result. Hopefully, it will be passed by the end of the year, and then we will work together in committee to find the right solution.

No Member came more quickly to me to talk about the Perkins Loan Program than did the Senator from Ohio, ROB PORTMAN, who has an eye for the budget with his broad experience as Director of the budget and with a large number of colleges and universities in Ohio. He is here today to discuss the Perkins Loan Program, along with Senator BALDWIN, Senator AYOTTE, and Senator CASEY.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Tennessee. I appreciate his work and help to ensure these kids are not going to be left in the lurch. There are kids in the State of Ohio who are expecting to get their Perkins loans this January as they go into the next semester, and there were certainly thousands of young people who were hoping in the fall that they were going to be able to take advantage of it, and they were very uncertain.

It is a big program in Ohio. We actually have over 25,000 Ohio students who receive financial aid through Perkins. In one school alone, Kent State, 3,000 students.

By the way, I got lobbied on this very directly. A young woman named Keri Richmond interned in my office last summer. Keri is a classic example of someone who needs Perkins because it fills in the gaps for her. In her case, she has a Pell. Yet as a young woman who has been in and out of foster homes her entire life—and, by the way, is a wonderful advocate and spokesperson for that program and how it helps foster kids to get on their feet—she does not have the help at home that many students do. So even for the small things, she needs that Perkins loan. She is very grateful today that we are extending this program, of course; but, more importantly, she is grateful for all her other colleagues at Kent State and around the State of Ohio.

I was with some Ohio State students a couple weeks ago for a holiday party with the president of Ohio State, who is very pleased this has been finally handled because he was trying to plan. As we know, schools play a big role in Perkins. It is essentially like a revolving loan program. With the interest, they are able to come up with new loans for the next year. So the colleges and universities in Ohio are very involved. We have 1,700 students at Ohio State; overall, we have 60 schools in the Buckeye State—colleges and universities—taking advantage of this. So this is a big deal for us.

I appreciate the fact that the chairman has been willing to sit down and work with us on this and come up with a way for us to move forward to give these young people the certainty that they need at a time when it is more expensive to go to college. This is a barrier for a lot of young people to be able to get that degree, to get the experience, to have the ability to be able to go out in this tough job market and be able to find work and find their place in the workforce. I am happy we have come to this point.

I will say I am very eager to work with the chairman, Ranking Member MURRAY, and others over the next period of time while we extend this program to come up with a better way to deal with our student loan program generally. I think the chairman makes a good point about the complexity. I think he is probably right that it is so complex that some parents and students are turned off by it, and we can simplify it. Certainly, we can, but I also want to make it clear that we need to be sure that we are providing maximum flexibility for students who might otherwise get left behind and wouldn't be able to take advantage of the opportunity to go to college and get a degree. We should be doing everything in our power to provide more students in my home State of Ohio and around the country the chance to get the tools they need in order to be able to be successful.

I thank Senator AYOTTE, Senator CASEY, and Senator BALDWIN. We have been at this for a while. We have been out here on the floor a few times talking about this. I think this is a result that lets us say to the people we represent back home: We are going to give you that certainty, that confidence to know this is not going to be pulled away.

On the other hand, we are going to work hard over the next couple of years to ensure that this program is viable for the longer term—along with other programs—and simplify these programs so they do work better for all the parents and all the students whom we represent.

I thank the chairman. This is one of the good results at the end of the year. In a way, going into the Christmas season, it is appropriate that we have this little package that is now wrapped up and has a ribbon on it. But it does expire, so our work is not done, and we will only redouble our efforts to ensure that we can come up with a program that does provide the flexibility and important safety net that Perkins does.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Ohio. He is exactly right. I know of no State that has more small colleges of the kind that would take advantage of Perkins loan probably than the State of Ohio. It is important to say that Senator BALDWIN, Senator CASEY, and Senator AYOTTE have been urgently making their case on the floor over the last several weeks and have done so in such an effective way that we have been able to come up with a bipartisan compromise. The more of that we are able to do, I think the more confidence the

American people will have in their Senators. So I appreciate his leadership in making this possible.

Another Senator who is a member of the Senate's committee that oversees education is the Senator from Pennsylvania, Mr. CASEY. He, too, has just completed work on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which many people thought we had no chance of passing this year and which we passed by a very large margin. I thank him, as I did Senator BALDWIN, for working in such a constructive way.

Some people look at the Senate and say: Well, you all are always arguing. Of course we are. That is what we do. That is like looking at the Grand Ole Opry and saying: You all are always singing. We have different points of view—and we do on the Perkins loan. But once we make our points of view known, we then do our jobs and we say: OK. Now we need to get a result. If all we wanted to do was to make a speech or make a point, we could stay home or get our own radio show. But we are Senators, and our job, having had our say, is to get a result.

So I thank Senator CASEY, the Senator from Pennsylvania not only for his work on this compromise on Perkins loans but also for his work on our efforts to fix No Child Left Behind. I look forward to his comments.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I thank the chairman for his work in helping us get to this point today. It is an important moment at the end of an important year, and we are grateful for his leadership. Even when we have had a basic disagreement to get this compromise worked out, it would not have happened, it could not have happened without his leadership and working with Democrats on our side of the aisle, Senator MURRAY, as the ranking member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, working with Chairman ALEXANDER. I thank Senator BALDWIN for her work in leading this effort on our side and leading our team.

This is a compromise, which, as Senator ALEXANDER noted, some people don't think we do enough of. I think it is an important example of why we must work together.

When we consider the compromise that I worked on and the other Senators who are here and others who are not here, along with our staffs—I mentioned Jared and Lauren on my staff, who did a lot of work on this, and we are grateful for that.

But we can report today some good news for more than 150,000 current freshmen Perkins loan recipients whose eligibility was cut off when the program expired on the 30th of September of this year. This bipartisan agreement provides for a 2-year extension of the Perkins Loan Program and provides some certainty for students and their families as we debate a longer term solution. We have more to do. Simply put, what students tell us they need is that basic certainty.

One of the reasons we are happy we have reached a compromise at this stage is that I think most of us believe what have I often said—that early education applies to higher education. If young people learn more when they are in their college years, they are going to earn more later. One of the ways to learn more when you are at that age is to have the resources and help of a loan program such as Perkins.

Perkins loans are critically important in a State such as Pennsylvania. Forty thousand students in Pennsylvania receive these loans at more than 100 schools. As many people know, these loans are fixed rate and they are low interest. Unlike traditional subsidized loans, they don't accrue interest when the student is in school. They have significant robust forgiveness opportunities for borrowers who, for example, become high school teachers or first responders or librarians or nurses or Peace Corps volunteers, among so many other professions. The loans can be consolidated to qualify for income-based repayment and other loan-forgiveness options.

This agreement ensures that those with the least financial resources will be able to continue to receive this important source of financial aid. Because of this compromise, freshmen and students across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania will not have to choose between dropping out and taking out unaffordable, high-interest private loans in order to secure their degree.

I would like to give two examples before I conclude.

Abigail Anderson, a freshman at Immaculata University, currently receives a Perkins loan of $2,000. She said she had it all figured out, but with this program expiring on September 30, she said: It changes everything. She said she didn't know how she was going to pay for school next year because her parents couldn't afford to pay any more. About the Perkins Loans, Abigail Anderson said, ''Every little amount counts. It makes a difference.''

Here is another example. Amber Gunn, a freshman at Temple University, is from Hazelton, PA, near my hometown of Scranton. Amber did not have enough money to pay her tuition bill even for this year. Her mother wasn't able to cosign her loans, but she was able to get a Perkins loan in the amount of $5,000 from the help of Temple University's financial aid office. Amber Gunn said as follows:

> Without the Perkins Loan I probably wouldn't have been able to enroll for my first semester of school. I'm not sure what I'll do next year without the loan, I'm kind of in a predicament.

For some, that might be an understatement.

So now, with this bipartisan agreement, neither Abigail nor Amber and so many others will have to worry. They can focus their attention on the end of the semester, their exams—and whatever else they are having to focus on—instead of wondering whether they will be able to afford to return to campus for their sophomore years.

Even with this compromise, we have lots of work to do—more work to do to come together on reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. But this is a good moment for the Senate, and it is especially a good moment for students and families across the country, and in my case for the some 40,000 in the State of Pennsylvania.

I thank the chairman for his leadership and again thank Senator BALDWIN.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I once again thank the Senator from Pennsylvania for being both a passionate advocate and skilled legislator in helping us come to a result here that meets most of the goals of the Senators who spoke about this, at least for the next 2 years, and gives us a chance in our committee to continue to work on it.

BUDGETARY REVISIONS

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, section 4313 of S. Con. Res. 11, the Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for Fiscal Year 2016, allows the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee to revise the allocations, aggregates and levels in the budget resolution for legislation that would amend the Higher Education Act of 1965. The authority to adjust is contingent on the legislation not increasing the deficit over either the period of the total of fiscal years 2016–2020 or the period of the total of fiscal years 2016–2025.

I find that amendment No. 2929 fulfills the conditions of deficit neutrality found in section 4313 of S. Con. Res. 11. Accordingly, I am revising the allocation to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and the budgetary aggregates to account for the budget effects of the legislation.

I ask unanimous consent that the accompanying tables, which provide details about the adjustment, be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

BUDGET AGGREGATES—BUDGET AUTHORITY AND OUTLAYS

(Pursuant to Section 311 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 and Section 4313 of S. Con. Res. 11, the Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for Fiscal Year 2016)

$s in millions	2016
Current Aggregates:	
Budget Authority	3,009,288
Outlays	3,067,674
Adjustments:	
Budget Authority	269
Outlays	269
Revised Aggregates:	
Budget Authority	3,009,557
Outlays	3,067,943

REVISION TO THE ALLOCATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS

(Pursuant to Section 302 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 and Section 4313 of S. Con. Res. 11, the Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for Fiscal Year 2016)

$s in millions	2016	2016–2020	2016–2025
Current Allocation:			
Budget Authority	12,137	83,101	160,672

REVISION TO THE ALLOCATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS—Continued

(Pursuant to Section 302 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 and Section 4313 of S. Con. Res. 11, the Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for Fiscal Year 2016)

$s in millions	2016	2016–2020	2016–2025
Outlays	14,271	85,383	171,731
Adjustments:			
Budget Authority	269	−14	−13
Outlays	269	−14	−13
Revised Allocation:			
Budget Authority	12,406	83,087	160,659
Outlays	14,540	85,369	171,718

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to the consideration of H.R. 3594, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3594) to extend temporarily the Federal Perkins Loan program, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I ask unanimous consent that the Alexander substitute amendment, which is at the desk, be agreed to, and that the bill, as amended, be read a third time.

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

The amendment (No. 2929) in the nature of a substitute was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute)

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Federal Perkins Loan Program Extension Act of 2015''.

SEC. 2. EXTENSION OF FEDERAL PERKINS LOAN PROGRAM.

(a) AUTHORITY TO MAKE LOANS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 461 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087aa) is amended—

(A) in subsection (a), by striking ''of stimulating and assisting in the establishment and maintenance of funds at institutions of higher education for the making of low-interest loans to students in need thereof'' and inserting ''assisting in the maintenance of funds at institutions of higher education for the making of loans to undergraduate students in need'';

(B) by striking subsection (b) and inserting the following:

''(b) AUTHORITY TO MAKE LOANS.—

''(1) IN GENERAL.—

''(A) LOANS FOR NEW UNDERGRADUATE FEDERAL PERKINS LOAN BORROWERS.—Through September 30, 2017, an institution of higher education may make a loan under this part to an eligible undergraduate student who, on the date of disbursement of a loan made under this part, has no outstanding balance of principal or interest on a loan made under this part from the student loan fund established under this part by the institution, but only if the institution has awarded all Federal Direct Loans, as referenced under subparagraphs (A) and (D) of section 455(a)(2), for which such undergraduate student is eligible.

''(B) LOANS FOR CURRENT UNDERGRADUATE FEDERAL PERKINS LOAN BORROWERS.—Through September 30, 2017, an institution of higher education may make a loan under this part to an eligible undergraduate student who, on the date of disbursement of a loan made under this part, has an outstanding balance of principal or interest on a loan made under this part from the student loan fund established under this part by the institution, but only if the institution has awarded all Federal Direct Stafford Loans as referenced under section 455(a)(2)(A) for which such undergraduate student is eligible.

''(C) LOANS FOR CERTAIN GRADUATE BORROWERS.—Through September 30, 2016, with respect to an eligible graduate student who has received a loan made under this part prior to October 1, 2015, an institution of higher education that has most recently made such a loan to the student for an academic program at such institution may continue making loans under this part from the student loan fund established under this part by the institution to enable the student to continue or complete such academic program.

''(2) NO ADDITIONAL LOANS.—An institution of higher education shall not make loans under this part after September 30, 2017.

''(3) PROHIBITION ON ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS.—No funds are authorized to be appropriated under this Act or any other Act to carry out the functions described in paragraph (1) for any fiscal year following fiscal year 2015.''; and

(C) by striking subsection (c).

(2) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Notwithstanding the amendments made under paragraph (1) of this subsection, an eligible graduate borrower who received a disbursement of a loan under part E of title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087aa et seq.) after June 30, 2016 and before October 1, 2016, for the 2016–2017 award year, may receive a subsequent disbursement of such loan by June 30, 2017, for which the borrower received an initial disbursement after June 30, 2016 and before October 1, 2016.

(b) DISTRIBUTION OF ASSETS FROM STUDENT LOAN FUNDS.—Section 466 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087ff) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by striking ''After September 30, 2003, and not later than March 31, 2004'' and inserting ''Beginning October 1, 2017''; and

(B) in paragraph (1), by striking ''September 30, 2003'' and inserting ''September 30, 2017'';

(2) in subsection (b)—

(A) by striking ''After October 1, 2012'' and inserting ''Beginning October 1, 2017''; and

(B) by striking ''September 30, 2003'' and inserting ''September 30, 2017''; and

(3) in subsection (c)(1), by striking ''October 1, 2004'' and inserting ''October 1, 2017''.

(c) ADDITIONAL EXTENSIONS NOT PERMITTED.—Section 422 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1226a) shall not apply to further extend the duration of the authority under paragraph (1) of section 461(b) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087aa(b)), as amended by subsection (a)(1) of this section, beyond September 30, 2017, on the basis of the extension under such subsection.

SEC. 3. DISCLOSURE REQUIRED PRIOR TO DISBURSEMENT.

Section 463A(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087cc–1(a)) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (12), by striking ''and'' after the semicolon;

(2) in paragraph (13), by striking the period at the end and inserting a semicolon; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

''(14) a notice and explanation regarding the end to future availability of loans made under this part;

''(15) a notice and explanation that repayment and forgiveness benefits available to borrowers of loans made under part D are not available to borrowers participating in the loan program under this part;

''(16) a notice and explanation regarding a borrower's option to consolidate a loan made under this part into a Federal Direct Loan under part D, including any benefit of such consolidation;

''(17) with respect to new undergraduate Federal Perkins loan borrowers, as described in section 461(b)(1)(A), a notice and explanation providing a comparison of the interest rates of loans under this part and part D and informing the borrower that the borrower has reached the maximum annual borrowing limit for which the borrower is eligible as referenced under subparagraphs (A) and (D) of section 455(a)(2); and

''(18) with respect to current undergraduate Federal Perkins loan borrowers, as described in section 461(b)(1)(B), a notice and explanation providing a comparison of the interest rates of loans under this part and part D and informing the borrower that the borrower has reached the maximum annual borrowing limit for which the borrower is eligible on Federal Direct Stafford Loans as referenced under section 455(a)(2)(A).''.

The bill was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading and was read the third time.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I know of no further debate on this measure.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Hearing no further debate, the bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall it pass?

The bill (H.R. 3594), as amended, was passed.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

Mr. ALEXANDER. Once again, I thank Senator BALDWIN, Senator CASEY, and the other Senators who participated in our colloquy, Senator AYOTTE and Senator PORTMAN. They have all pushed hard to see that we get a result on the Perkins loan extension. They have been effective advocates and skilled legislators, and I am grateful for their hard work.

There have been other Senators who have spoken on the floor and have been very passionate advocates. I don't think I have a list of all of them, but I know, for example, Senator COLLINS made her case here on the floor and in the conference on our elementary and secondary education bill for the students of Maine who receive Perkins Loans. I know Senator BLUMENTHAL was here on a day when I was here as well making his case for students in Connecticut. I know the Senator from Wisconsin, Mr. JOHNSON, was here making a vigorous case for the students from Wisconsin, as did Senator BALDWIN. Senator BOOZMAN of Arkansas and Senator COCHRAN of Mississippi have also been advocates as well as those who participated in the colloquy.

We have had a broad group of Senators involved both on the floor and in the negotiations. We now have passed a bill in the Senate. It will go to the House. Hopefully, it will be considered and become a law by the end of the year.

I look forward to working with my two colleagues on the education committee to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, with the goal of simplifying and making more effective the Federal Student Aid Program so American students can afford and can attend college or university.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CRUDE OIL EXPORT BAN

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I rise again to raise the case for lifting the 40-year-old ban on exporting crude oil. Lifting the ban will not only benefit my home State of North Dakota, but it will also benefit our Nation and our allies in a host of different ways, and that is why I worked hard to include legislation to repeal the ban in the year-end legislation that Congress now has under consideration.

Importantly, this is must-pass legislation, meaning it will be very hard for the President to veto lifting the ban on exporting crude oil. When taken together, the reasons for lifting the oil export ban are very powerful. Doing so will encourage more domestic production, increase the global supply of crude oil, thereby reducing the cost at the pump for our consumers, particularly over the long term, and it will grow our economy and create good-paying jobs for our citizens.

The last reason for lifting the ban is vitally important as well, particularly now as we work on making sure our Nation is secure. National security through energy security helps to keep our people safer. I will take a few minutes and go through those benefits one by one.

Let's start with the American consumer. The price of oil is based on supply and demand. The more oil on the market, the lower the price. It is a matter of simple economics—supply and demand. The volatility and global price of crude oil is felt right down to the consumer level. More global supply means lower prices at the pump for gasoline, benefiting our consumers and small businesses across the country. That means more money in consumers' pockets. Those facts are backed up by studies at both the U.S. Energy Information Administration—the EIA—which is part of the Department of Energy, as well as the nonpartisan Brookings Institute.

This spring, EIA Administrator Adam Sieminski confirmed that finding in testimony before our Energy and Natural Resources Committee, of which I am a member. In September, the EIA released a new report that reaffirms the benefits to consumers and businesses that would result from lifting the decades-old crude oil export ban. It stands to reason if we just think about it for a minute. Oil is a global commodity, right? The global price is based on North Sea oil, or Brent crude, so that is the global price. Because we are not allowed to export oil, the domestic price is different. That is based on WTI—West Texas Intermediate—crude. So the West Texas Intermediate crude price typically simply runs somewhere between $5 and $8 a barrel lower than Brent crude, the international price. So here we are producing oil—my State of Texas and others—we produce some of the lightest, sweetest crude in the world. Yet when our producers sell that, they are getting $5 to $8 less per barrel than people who are producing internationally. So we are talking about OPEC, Russia, Venezuela, our competitors—they price off Brent. They are getting $5 to $8 more for every barrel they sell.

Now, think about that. Let's say you are a store or a business of any kind. For selling the same product or selling a better product, you are going to get less money than your competitor. Which of you stays in business? Which of you grows and produces more of that product? Which of you goes out of business?

So what is going on in the world right now? We have OPEC flooding the market. Why are they doing that? They are doing that to capture market share and to reassert their dominance. Once they put us out of business, then they are back in the driver's seat and prices will go right back up for the consumer. We don't want to let that happen. We want a robust oil and gas industry that will make sure that we have competition, that we have energy security, and that consumers have lower prices at the pump.

Second, in addition to benefiting consumers, crude oil exports benefit our economy here at home. Crude oil exports will increase revenues and boost overall economic growth. It will help increase wages, create jobs, and improve our balance of trade. One area of our economy that currently enjoys a favorable balance of trade is agriculture. That is because our farmers and our ranchers successfully market their products around the globe. Our crude oil producers can do the same if they are given the opportunity. Local economies also benefit. Service industries, retail, and other businesses and communities centered on oil development will see more economic activity and growth if this antiquated ban is lifted. Also, crude oil exports will benefit our domestic industry, our energy industry, obviously.

The EIA's latest study concluded that lifting the ban will reduce the discount for light sweet crude oil produced in States such as North Dakota, Texas, and others and encourage investment to expand domestic energy production.

The drop in the price of oil this year has slowed domestic production. In our State of North Dakota, we continue to produce oil. In fact, our State increased production in October to almost 1.17 million barrels a day. That is up a little bit from last month when we produced about 1.16, but we are already down from our peak earlier this year of 1.2 million barrels a day.

This goes back to what I am saying. We are in a fight to determine who is going to produce oil and gas globally. Do we want that to be America or would we prefer that to be OPEC, Russia, Venezuela, and some of our other adversaries?

Our producers are resilient, innovative, and highly competitive. They are developing new technologies and techniques to become more cost-effective and more efficient all the time. Allowing them to compete in the global market will not only make us more inventive, more creative, and deploy better technologies but grow our economy and grow our domestic oil and gas industry.

Of course, that means high-paying jobs for our people. According to a study by IHS, a global provider of industry data and analysis, lifting the ban will attract an estimated $750 billion in new investments and create nearly 400,000 additional jobs in the United States between 2016 and 2030. I have seen studies that are actually higher. That is $750 billion in private investment—not government spending, in private investment—to stimulate and grow our economy and 400,000 additional jobs. Again, those are jobs in the private sector—not more government—private sector jobs, economic growth, more revenue to help reduce the deficit and the debt without raising taxes. We know that from experience in North Dakota, where in recent years per capita personal income has been growing faster than any other State in the country, not solely but in large part because of oil and gas production.

On a national level, crude oil exports will help to bring our energy policy into the 21st century. The crude oil export ban is an economic strategy that was implemented in the 1970s, and the world has changed dramatically since then. Back then, the conventional wisdom was that there was a finite amount of oil in the world, and we pretty much knew where it was, and there were even alarms at that time that we were going to run out of oil. Barton Hinkle pointed out in Reason magazine that as recently as 2005, the BBC asked: ''Is global oil production reaching a peak?''

In 2008, the Houston Chronicle declared: ''We are approaching peak oil sooner than many people would have thought.''

Two years later, the New York Times reported on a group of environmentalists who ''argue that oil supplies peaked as early as 2008 and will decline rapidly, taking the economy with them.''

Yet here we are. Nobody envisioned the kind of energy revolution we are seeing in the United States—in North Dakota, in Texas, and in other oil-and-gas-producing States—with new and creative technologies that produce more energy with better environmental stewardship.

Back in 2011 I asked then-Interior Secretary Salazar to have the U.S. Geological Survey do a new study to update estimates of recoverable reserves in the Williston Basin. In April of 2013, the results came in and they were profound. The USGS found that there are approximately 7.4 billion barrels of technically recoverable oil in the Williston Basin, which is more than twice the previous estimate. The upper end of that estimate is 11.4 billion barrels of recoverable oil. It is about twice the USGS estimate made in April of 2008, which projected about 3.65 billion recoverable barrels in the Bakken formation.

So my point is, in less than 5 years' time, with the new technology and development, we have more than doubled the amount of recovery oil just in the Williston Basin, in the North Dakota-Montana area, from 3.65 billion barrels to 7.4 billion barrels, and we are just scratching the surface.

The report also estimates there to be about 6.7 trillion cubic feet of undiscovered, technically recoverable natural gas, nearly three times the estimate 5 years earlier.

So again my point: We don't even drill for natural gas. We are drilling for oil and we produce natural gas as a byproduct. And the amount available is going up dramatically. As I say, the most recent estimate for natural gas, 3.67 trillion cubic feet, is more than double the amount just 5 years earlier. That is what technology is doing with the resource. This is the opportunity we have.

Recoverable oil projections to date may be as little as several percentages of what is actually in the ground. That is the kind of potential we have. That is the kind of potential we have to depend on ourselves for energy, not OPEC or anyone else.

I recently asked the USGS Director, Suzette M. Kimball, to update the most recent assessments to provide more information on a new formation that we are producing in North Dakota—the Tyler. That is because industry advances in directional drilling and hydraulic fracturing have greatly expanded the ability to access formerly difficult areas. As I said, the industry is working on a new formation—the Tyler formation.

I want to make one other point, too, and this goes to environmental stewardship. We are actually producing less greenhouse gas in the country today than we have in prior years. A big part of the reason is something called hydraulic fracturing because now, with hydraulic fracturing, we are producing so much more natural gas that we have low-priced, abundant natural gas, and as we use more of it we are actually reducing carbon emissions in the United States. So isn't it ironic that as we develop and deploy the new technologies to produce oil and gas more efficiently, more economically, and more dependably, at the same time, through hydraulic fracturing and directional drilling, we are also doing so with better environmental stewardship.

Isn't that what American innovation and ingenuity is all about? Isn't that the creativity that we unleash in the private sector, when we create a good business climate and we empower investment, rather than block it with regulation and taxation and roadblocks and redtape that doesn't make any sense? That is how we create that rising tide that lifts all boats. That is how we become the most powerful and dynamic economy in the history of the world. That is how we create more jobs and opportunity for our people.

So now, just 10 years after some were lamenting the depletion of the world's oil reserves, the model has shifted from scarcity to abundance, and we will need additional investments in technology, transportation, and energy infrastructure, such as pipelines, rail, roads, and other industry needs to produce that energy. The good news is that the industry will build the infrastructure, create the jobs, and produce the energy we need if we just provide them with that good business climate and that opportunity to do it. As I said, as they deploy those advanced technologies, as they make that investment, they produce jobs, economic growth, more tax revenue, without raising taxes, to help with the debt and deficit, and they do so with better environmental stewardship. That is how we lead the world forward with better environmental stewardship, with American ingenuity, creativity, and innovation.

Lifting the ban will create more domestic production and energy infrastructure, which holds two key benefits. First, more domestic production and infrastructure means that in a national emergency, Americans will not be dependent on the need for oil from elsewhere in the world—places like OPEC. Americans do not want to return to depending on OPEC for our energy.

The second benefit is that U.S. crude oil will provide strategic geopolitical benefits for us and for our allies around the world. It will provide our friends with alternative sources of oil and reduce their reliance on Russia, Venezuela, Iran, and other unstable parts of the world for their vital energy needs.

As a further security advantage, adding more domestic supply will provide a buffer against shortages going to volatile conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere around the globe. We finally have an opportunity to curb the disproportionate influence OPEC has had on the world oil markets for almost half a century, and we need to capitalize on it.

One final point on national security. We must recognize the implications of the President's deal with Iran, which lifts sanctions against Iranian oil. That agreement will put 1 million barrels a day of Iran's oil on the global market and billions of dollars in their Treasury. Does it make any sense at all to maintain a ban on U.S. oil exports while the President lifts a ban on Iranian oil exports? Of course not. Clearly, it does not. In fact, we should be maintaining the sanctions on Iran even as we lift the oil export ban on our producers.

The consensus among lawmakers and experts in the field of energy and national security is evident: Lifting the ban on U.S. oil exports will create jobs, boost our economy, and bolster our national defense. It is supported by studies done by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, EIA—part of the Department of Energy—the nonpartisan Brookings Institute, and Harvard Business School.

Last week we held an Energy and Natural Resources Committee meeting to examine the link between terrorism and the global oil and gas market. The results were telling. Expert witnesses from such highly regarded, nonpartisan think tanks as the Center for a New American Security and IHS, a global provider of data and analysis, affirmed that lifting the oil export ban will enhance national security. Representative of the general opinion in the hearing was testimony by Dr. Sara Vakhshouri, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, who said that with the Middle East in turmoil and confronting terrorist attacks and threats, it is important to have alternative resources and ''especially from the U.S.''

Jamie Webster, senior director at IHS, capped the issue, saying: ''We have put out a couple of studies on the crude export issue and our finding is that this is a clear win for the U.S. economy and also for energy security. It's difficult to find a case where this is not a positive.''

The ban on crude oil exports is an anachronism, a solution to a problem that no longer exists owing to the innovation of the American energy industry. At this time in our history, all the circumstances argue for lifting the ban. Americans need jobs, the economy needs a free market boost, and the American people deserve the security of knowing that in an emergency, we have a reliable and abundant source of energy as well as the infrastructure to deliver it. Lifting the ban on crude exports is an idea whose time has come. Let's get it done.

I am very pleased to see my esteemed colleague from the great State of Texas, the only State that produces more oil than my home State of North Dakota, but we are working hard, and you know when you are in second position, you always run a little harder, work a little harder. We are hot after them, but I must say they do an amazing job down there. His leadership on

this issue has been tremendous because he understands it is not only important for the Lone Star State, but it is important for our country.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, while the Senator from North Dakota is still here, let me just say that he gave a speech that I wish I could have given. I couldn't say it any better than he did, but I will just make one point as he is preparing to leave the floor.

Some people wonder why is it that the Texas economy is doing so well relative to the rest of the country. Last year, 2014, our economy grew at 5.2 percent. The U.S. economy grew at 2.2 percent. Now the fact that we are producing energy using the techniques the Senator from North Dakota talked about—fracking and horizontal drilling—fracking, by the way, has been around for 70 years or more—that has helped contribute to job creation and our economic growth. This is something we would like to see expand across the country.

We have been blessed, as has the Senator from North Dakota, with abundant natural resources. What we are asking to be able to do is to sell those to willing buyers overseas. Many of them are some of our closest allies, who are being terrorized by thugs such as Vladimir Putin, who uses energy as a weapon. Think about how powerful this would be in our national security toolbox to be able to sell natural gas and crude oil to some of our closest allies so they don't have to rely on people like Mr. Putin.

I congratulate the Senator from North Dakota, Mr. HOEVEN, for his leadership on this issue. We have all worked together on it, and it has been a team effort, and we are close to getting it done.

The final point I want to make is that this is not just about energy-producing States, this is a net positive for the United States and for our allies abroad.

Mr. HOEVEN. Will the Senator from Texas yield for just a minute?

Mr. CORNYN. I will be happy to.

Mr. HOEVEN. I want to pick up on that last point. It is particularly important when you consider this legislation that this bill just doesn't benefit the oil-and-gas-producing States, it really benefits everybody when you think about all of the infrastructure and the materials, the equipment that goes into producing that energy. When you talk about drilling down 10,000 feet, 2 miles underground, and drilling out 3 miles in multiple directions; when you talk about the equipment that is needed to do that, the tanks, the transportation; when you talk about all the things—the research, development, engineering—that go into it, I doubt there is a State in the Union that isn't touched by this energy industry. That is something I think all of our Members have to keep in mind when we look at this legislation. It is not just about energy-producing States, it is about all of us in terms of the economy, and it is about all of us in terms of national security. We are the ones leading forward with the newest technology that will leave the environment with better stewardship.

I am glad the Senator actually brought up that point, and I hope our colleagues will keep that in mind as we bring forward this legislation.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, there is another benefit that spreads evenly among Americans, and that is low gasoline prices. The single driver for low gasoline prices is the supply of oil. Because of the abundant supply of oil due to innovation and these techniques the Senator from North Dakota talked about, oil prices are lower than they have been in a long time.

You can buy a gallon of gasoline in Texas for well under $2. I think I saw it as cheap as $1.80 or maybe lower than that in some places. That has a direct impact on the pocketbook of working families. That is another reason why this legislation needs to be passed on Friday of this week in the House and in the Senate. I thank the Senator from North Dakota for this brief discussion.

WORKING TOGETHER IN THE SENATE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I wanted to come to the floor and talk about what we have been able to accomplish this year because sometimes I think people, when they hear us talk, think we are somehow claiming credit where credit is not entirely due or whether we are trying to make this purely a partisan matter. It is not, but it does require good leadership.

As the Presiding Officer knows, having been speaker of the house in North Carolina, the people who set the agenda—that is a pretty important power. All of the legislation that has passed this year would not have passed if it weren't for the majority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, under the new majority scheduling it for a vote in the Senate and chairmen in the relevant committees processing that legislation at the committee level and making it available for floor consideration.

It is not just the Republican majority. Time after time, we have seen Republicans and Democrats working together hand in glove to try to pass legislation that is good for the American people. We saw that on the Education reform bill, where Senator MURRAY and Senator ALEXANDER worked so closely together. We saw it on the highway bill—the first multiyear highway bill in a decade—where the Senator from California, Mrs. BOXER, working together with Senator INHOFE from Oklahoma and the majority leader, worked to really turn things around in the House of Representatives, to give them the space and time to pass a multiyear highway bill and to work with us to reconcile the differences and get it to the President. That is pretty important.

I was on the phone earlier today talking with some of the folks at the Austin American-Statesman about the impact on the traffic situation we have on I–35. It is a veritable parking lot during many times of the day. People understand the importance of taking care of infrastructure and maintaining it but also expanding it so people can get from point A to point B, but more importantly, what that means in terms of the environment and their quality of life.

So my simple point is that there is a big difference to the way this Chamber operated under the Democratic leader, when Senator REID was majority leader, back when our friends across the aisle were in the majority. The statistic has been mentioned that there were 15 rollcall votes on amendments. We have had more than 200 so far this year alone. Frankly, I think our Democratic friends like the way the Senate has been operating under the current majority more than they did when they were in the majority because under the dysfunction of the previous majority, even Democrats in the majority weren't able to get votes on the amendments. When they stood before the voters, people asked ''What have you done?'' and they didn't have much to show except dysfunction.

As the Presiding Officer knows, whether it is North Carolina or other places around the country, we got a number of new Senators as a result of that misguided dysfunction, which was calculated but I think proved to be a miscalculation.

It is a good thing to see the Senate operating again in the interests of the American people. We have had a pretty busy session. I am not claiming it was perfect. Frustrations abound. It is in the nature of divided government.

The legislative process was designed by our Founding Fathers in the Constitution to be hard because they actually saw the concentration of power as a threat to their freedom and their liberty, and they didn't want an efficient Federal Government. They wanted checks and balances. They wanted checks between the various branches, between the two branches of the legislature, and also checks and balances with regard to the allocation of power to the Federal Government relative to the States and individuals. All of that separation of power was designed to require deliberation and to require transparency and the building of consensus before legislation was passed that would have an impact on their lives.

It has been a good thing to see the Senate working again, and I think all of us, Republicans and Democrats alike, can be proud of some of the work we have done.

One of the things I am most proud of this year is the fact that we were able to pass a bill called the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act by 99 to 0. This

was the first legislation that actually provided a crime victims compensation fund to help provide grants to victims of human trafficking. As I have described before on this floor, the typical profile of a victim of human trafficking is a young girl between the ages of 12 and 14. We need to have resources available for people with big hearts in communities all across this country to help rescue these victims of trafficking and help them recover their lives and get on with their lives in a more productive and safe manner. This is one of the things we have done together.

PARIS CLIMATE CHANGE AGREEMENT

Mr. CORNYN. Now, Mr. President, I want to spend a few minutes talking about some of the things on which I don't think we are going to be able to find political consensus. That has to do with the President's moving up his list of priorities. Among all the other things that are going on in the world, he seems to be saying that climate change is the most urgent challenge facing the United States and the world. I worry a little bit any time I hear a politician—or anybody, for that matter—making sort of messianic claims. The President characterized the agreement in Paris—and I will talk more about the nature of that agreement—''a turning point for the world.'' It strikes me that it takes quite a bit of hubris and really arrogance to be claiming that yes, this is going to be a turning point for the world. As a matter of fact, the Wall Street Journal said that it pays to be skeptical of a politician who claims to be saving the planet.

I don't share the President's priorities when it comes to climate change because I think there are actually more urgent priorities, such as fighting terrorism both abroad and here at home. That would be a more urgent priority. Some of the other more prosaic work we do here is pretty important to the quality of lives of the American people and to the economy, our ability to create an environment where they can find work and provide for their families. I think those needs are more urgent.

Nevertheless, the President seems to be once again exaggerating what his authority is under our Constitution. Of course, the President has no legal authority to bind his successor. What he seems to be saying is ''This is an agreement between me and the 140-some-odd nations,'' and it won't last beyond his Presidency. Last time I checked, the President will be leaving the White House sometime in January 2017. What he has purported to do is enter into an agreement that would somehow bind his successor and would somehow bind the Congress and the American people. But under our Constitution, this President—no President has any authority to do anything like that.

So it is clear that this agreement has been crafted in a way that gives some of the countries that are parties to the agreement more leeway than others. Some major economies don't have to play by the same rules that the United States would.

This agreement represents the President once again trying to claim authority he simply does not have. We don't have a king. In America, we made that decision a long time ago. I think it was 1787 when we decided we would not have a king, but the President seems to act like a monarch and claim authorities from some source other than the Constitution. It seems unbelievable that after the Obama administration has failed to find support for so many of the President's overreaching regulations here at home—not in the Congress, not in the State houses, not in the courts—his response was to sign on to an agreement with the United Nations that seeks to tax our use of energy. It is another attempt to do an end run around the Constitution and around the American people.

What really frustrates me is the President's willingness to sacrifice our economy—job creation and the ability of people to find work and to provide for their family—to promote a cause that offers no guarantee of a more resilient climate or a clean environment.

The President and some of his supporters frequently like to say: Well, people who don't regard climate change as a priority are anti-science. I actually think people who think agreements such as this are going to provide the answer are anti-science.

First, if you start looking at some of the models that are used to predict temperatures decades and perhaps centuries out, this is not what you would call science, this is more like an economic projection or model, and we know how reliable they have been in the past.

I couldn't help but think about growing up and a book that I remember reading called ''The Population Bomb,'' which was written by a Stanford professor named Paul R. Ehrlich. The thesis of ''The Population Bomb'' was that unless we did something to control population, millions of people were going to starve to death because we were going to outstrip our food supply.

Well, obviously that didn't happen. One of the reasons it didn't happen is because of a man by the name of Norman Borlaug, a Nobel Prize winner, and now considered the father of the Green Revolution. By the way, he did spend a little bit of time at Texas A&M in Bryan College Station. But he was a very heroic figure who used science to help figure out how to increase production of the food supply in a way that made Paul Ehrlich's prediction a pipe dream. It just didn't happen.

I think that by predicting all these dire consequences, it is the predictors—it is the people who are embracing this sort of climate change theology—who don't have any confidence in our ability to innovate our way out of these problems.

I will use one more anecdote to try to make the point. At the start of the 20th century, horses in New York City were producing about 5 million pounds of manure a day. Can you imagine what an environmental hazard this would be with manure piled on vacant lots with rats? I will not go into all the details; it is pretty repulsive to think about. But there is a book called ''SuperFreakanomics,'' which uses this great example. They said: Well, what happened to that? Instead of some grandiose government policy or instead of some new tax or regulation that government issued, what happened to that and the environmental hazard that presented was the internal combustion engine. So not overnight, but apparently in short order, that manure was disposed of. Horses were replaced by cars.

Again, it is just another example of how American innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurialism can take care of many of these problems that some of our friends worry so much about and think should be such an important priority for us. America's entrepreneurs have shown time and again that they are simply more adaptive and genius than government regulators and bureaucrats.

By bypassing the American people and signing our country up for a bad international agreement that doesn't put our country first, we should instead focus on finding innovative solutions that fit the diverse needs of consumers, businesses, and a growing economy alike.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

HONORING OUR MEN AND WOMEN IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

SERGEANT SEAN RENFRO, TROOPER TAYLOR THYFAULT, JAIMIE JURSEVICS, AND OFFICER GARRETT SWASEY

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I rise today to honor our men and women in law enforcement. Across the United States this year, 118 law enforcement officers have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

In Colorado, we honor our four fallen officers: Sergeant Sean Renfro with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, whose care and concern for others did not end when he was off duty; Trooper Taylor Thyfault with the Colorado State Patrol, an Army veteran and a cadet training to become a trooper and due to his bravery was honored as a trooper before being laid to rest; Jaimie Jursevics with the Colorado State Patrol, a new mom and the victim of the careless actions of another; and Officer Garrett Swasey with the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs Police Department, our most recent loss, as he responded to the senseless attack in Colorado Springs.

Each of their legacies reflects an extraordinary Colorado spirit, each a cherished member of their community, leaving behind loved ones as they

worked to uphold the law and care for those around them. These heroes risked their lives, and they showed the highest courage. And as we prepare our hearts and our homes for the holiday season, I hope we can all take a few moments to express our sincere gratitude for their service and protection. In the best of times, patrolling the roadways, being present in our neighborhoods, and maintaining order can be a difficult and dangerous duty. I am proud of the work the men and women who make up each law enforcement office in Colorado carry out each and every day. On watch in precincts, correctional facilities, and along our highways, they diligently fight to safeguard our State.

Colorado families, including mine, from the Eastern Plains to the Western Slope remain safe in large part because of the work and valor of our law enforcement personnel. As the guardians of our communities, they prepare to respond to things that most of society simply hope will never happen to them. Lt. Col. Dave Grossman wrote that American law enforcement is the loyal and brave sheepdog, always standing watch for the wolf that lurks in the dark.

With the recent events at home and abroad, we are reminded of the threats that are hiding in the shadows and the dangers that police officers confront each and every day. Yet they remain steadfast in their commitment to stand against evil.

I am personally grateful for the sacrifices they make and the commitment they demonstrate to protect our State and our country. Their courage and selfless service were exemplified in the recent tragedy in Colorado Springs. As first responders, they are the first to encounter the fear, the calls for help, and the danger, but in that fear and danger, they provide hope and safety. Driven by courage and the desire to serve, they fulfill a great need throughout our communities. They carry these values as they begin their watch each and every day when they leave their family to protect mine and every other American. Their badge identifies them as a source of help in vulnerable times, and behind each badge of police officers, sheriff deputies, correctional officers, and patrolmen and patrolwomen is a heart that extends beyond its own bounds.

Calling Colorado home rings truer when you also have the honor to safeguard it. I am thankful for their service and thankful to the families for their continued sacrifice. They are constantly in my family's thoughts and prayers, and we wish them each a safe and happy holiday.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

TAX BREAK EQUALITY

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, today is a great day to be an oil company in America. Not since August 27, 1859, when Edwin Drake drilled that first oil well in Titusville, PA, has there been a day as good for the oil industry in our country as today.

Why is today a great day for Big Oil? Well, I will tell you. Last night at 2 a.m., the Republican leadership released its spending bill. Tucked into that bill on page 1,865 is a provision that would massively reshape our Nation's energy policy. Tucked into that bill is language that would roll back longstanding U.S. law and allow the oil industry to sell American crude oil overseas for the first time in more than 40 years.

If this becomes law, it means potentially $175 billion in new revenue for the oil industry over the next decade, up to $500 billion in new revenues for the oil industry over the next 20 years. That is why this provision is in there. It is corporate welfare for the most profitable industry in the history of the world, the oil industry.

What does this mean for the American people? Lifting the ban on the exportation of American oil so it goes overseas rather than staying here in America. It will be a disaster for our economy, for our climate, for our national security, and for our consumers. Do you remember the old mantra of the Republican Party, ''Drill here, drill now, pay less''? Now they have changed it. Their new mantra is ''Drill here, export there, pay more.''

The oil industry push to export American oil isn't about helping consumers at the pump; it is about pumping up Big Oil's profits. When has the oil industry ever pushed for policies that would drive down prices and their profits? These are for-profit corporations, not charitable institutions. They are looking to make lots of new money off of selling oil around the world but not here in the United States.

If we allow this to happen, it will be a disaster for consumers in many regions of the country—for example, the Northeast. The Department of Energy has said that losing our refineries on the east coast, which could easily happen because of this new law, will lead to ''higher prices,'' ''higher price volatility,'' and the potential for ''temporary [supply] disruptions'' in our region.

Right now consumers across America in 2015 are saving $700 because gasoline prices are so low and $500 on home heating oil because prices are so low. That is a stimulus, almost like a tax break in the pockets of working-class and poor Americans all across our country.

Exports would wipe out this economic stimulus for average Americans. It would begin to lead to the higher prices that the oil industry wants, both on the global market and here in the United States of America. And the new revenue the oil industry collects from exports is not magically created out of thin air; it will be transferred from American consumers and our domestic refiners into the pockets of the Big Oil companies in our country. This could amount to one of the largest single energy taxes in the history of the world.

Remember, Saudi Arabia and their OPEC allies control the global oil trade. They control the price that is paid on the global market, and recently OPEC suggested oil prices may rise again next year, putting in jeopardy the economic benefits that low gasoline prices and the low home-heating oil prices have provided for average Americans.

Second, national security. Importing our oil while we export our young men and women abroad—that is what we have right now. We are importing oil from Saudi Arabia, from Nigeria, from Algeria, from Kuwait, and from Iraq. That is what happens every day. That is a big reason we have so many young men and women over in the Middle East protecting those cargo ships of oil coming into our country. We still import 5 million barrels of oil a day. China and the United States are the largest importers.

We don't have oil to export. We are still importing 25 percent of our oil into our country right now, and we are importing it from countries we should not be importing that oil from. If we have a chance to back out that oil, to tell those countries we don't need their oil any more than we need their sand, we are doing a big favor for our young men and women in uniform. We are allowing ourselves to step back and be more dispassionate in the decisions we make about our relationships with all of those countries.

What this decision says is we are going to export our own oil even as we continue to import oil from the Middle East. This will only heighten our dependence upon oil coming in from countries that we should not be importing oil from if we have a chance to back it out. That is what is wrong with this decision at its heart—oil. It is not like a widget. It is not like a computer chip. You don't fight wars over that. You fight wars over oil. That is why ISIS targets the part of Syria that it does. That is why the part of Saudi Arabia that has the oil is the one now being jeopardized by rebels. That is why Libya is so valuable and being fought over—oil, oil, oil—and the revenues that they produce in order to then create that instability, create that jihadism that we are dealing with. We should be backing out all the oil we are importing from that region if we have a chance to do so, and we do, but not after this bill passes. We are going to be in a situation where we basically are saying we are going to be permanently dependent upon that oil being imported from that region.

I listened last night to all the Republican candidates for President debating in Las Vegas about national security. Well, that is what this is all about—this is all about that oil. This is all about that oil revenue that goes into the pockets of people who should not

have our money, who spend it in ways we don't feel good about.

In my opinion, this decision will dramatically weaken our national security position, weaken our ability to be stronger in the Middle East because we are less dependent upon pretty much the only product they make—oil—and would be able to deal with the national security issues in a much better way, being much more clear-eyed, dispassionate, and protective of American interests and the interests of those we are allied with over the world.

Third, this is a tale of two tax breaks. One tax break is for Big Oil. They get $7 to $8 billion a year in tax breaks, and it is permanent—permanent. What happened in this bill is that the $7 to $8 billion for tax breaks for wind and solar are now going to be phased out. We hear constantly from Republicans out here on the floor that they believe in ''all of the above.'' Well, you can't have ''all of the above'' competing fairly if one industry—the oil industry—gets their $7 to $8 billion in tax breaks every year, and wind and solar—the technologies of the 21st century—are going to have their tax breaks phased out over the next 4 to 5 years. That is in this bill.

So the oil industry gets $500 billion in new revenues over the next 20 years, $140 billion worth of tax breaks over the next 20 years, and wind and solar watch their tax breaks evaporate over the next 4 to 5 years. Is that a good deal for America, for the climate, for our job creation in America with jobs that are here in America? That is not a good deal. By the way, Big Oil wants their tax breaks so they can export the oil out of our country. Is that a good deal? It absolutely is not.

For the offshore wind industry, which has yet to be born, we need the tax breaks to incentivize companies—wind companies from around the world—to come to the Northeast, to come to this incredible place which has been called the Saudi Arabia of wind. Those tax breaks are going to phase out before an industry is even born—the offshore wind industry. Does that make any sense? If we are going to give tax breaks to oil, we should give tax breaks to the offshore wind industry. We should give tax breaks to all these renewable industries on a predictable basis for years to come. That is not happening in this bill. It is just the opposite.

For national security, for equality, in terms of all energy resources but especially those nonpolluting energy resources, there should be equality, but there is not. There is not. We could have an America with 40 percent of all electricity being wind and solar by the year 2030, if we kept the same tax breaks between now and 2030—40 percent. The 7 percent we would add in from hydropower and then the power that comes from nuclear power in our country, over 60 to 65 percent of all electricity in America would be noncarbon polluting by the year 2030, but the tax breaks for wind and solar are going away in 4 to 5 years. Does that make any sense? No, not at all. That is what this bill does, and that is why this bill has that provision that was inserted late at night a couple of nights ago that is on page 1,865 in this omnibus bill.

The Koch brothers wrote a letter to all Republicans a couple of days ago. They said: Lift the ban on exportation of oil out of our country, even as we still import from the Middle East, and reduce and kill solar and wind tax breaks.

Good. We understand the agenda. It is in this bill, and it is not good for America. It is not who we are. It is not this innovation economy which we know is going to have the capacity, like we did with cell phones, to very briefly in history just move from this kind of a phone in 1996, when it never really existed in people's pockets anywhere on the planet, to this kind of phone and now 600 million people in Africa have it today. We did that—America. We can do the same thing with renewable energy, but we need to ensure that those tax breaks are equal to oil's, for oil is the technology of the 19th century, the oil of the 20th century. We have to have a vision of what is possible here in the 21st century. This bill does not include that.

That is why it is being added to a must-pass bill. It could not pass if it was not in a must-pass bill with unrelated issues, unrelated appropriations. They needed it to carry it through because they could not do it standing alone down here on the floor of the Senate.

So whether it be the impact on our economy, which is going to drive prices higher, or whether it be on our national security, it is going to increase our dependence upon imports from the Middle East. Whether it be the impact on consumers, where they are going to be paying higher prices, or whether it be the environment, where, believe it or not, by the year 2025 this is going to lead to upward of 2 to 3 million new barrels of oil per day being exported out of our country—that is the equivalent of building 150 coal-burning plants in our country and sending those emissions up into the sky.

Having a bill pass on the floor of the Senate in the same week that the whole world came together in Paris and signed an agreement saying we were going to have less greenhouse gases going up into the atmosphere and that the United States was going to be the leader—we cannot tell the rest of the world to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels while we announce in the next week we are going to change our policy and start drilling for 2 to 3 million new barrels just to export it out of our country and phase out the tax breaks for wind and solar as we tell the rest of the world they should be moving to wind and solar. That does not work. You cannot preach temperance from a bar stool. You cannot preach temperance from an oil rig and tell other countries to move to renewables. It just doesn't work that way. It doesn't work that way. They might nod. They might say: Oh, don't worry. We are still going to honor our commitments. But you know behind your back as a country they are just going to be saying: I see what they are doing. We will start doing the same stuff. We will build a few more coal-burning ones. We will burn more fossil fuels over here. If they are not sincere, why should we be sincere? If they can preach temperance on Sunday and then on Wednesday say ''bingo'' in the church hall, we can do the same thing.

So I am just afraid that on every one of these lines this bill fails: environment, national security, consumers, and the economy. It is bad for America. It is bad policy. We should feel better about our capacity to innovate.

I am especially concerned about wind. I am especially concerned about offshore wind. There is a reason we call ourselves the Saudi Arabia of wind. It is because we have the potential to back out the oil from Saudi Arabia. That is why. That is our metaphor because we know how much oil they have and how they have controlled the price of oil in the world every single day since 40 years ago, when they decided to have their first oil embargo. That is when we put this law on the books that we would never export our oil again. We would keep it here.

It is 40 years later. The Middle East is in chaos. It is hard for anyone to even describe what the future for the Middle East is going to be. How many of these leaders are actually even going to be in place in 5 years? No one in the world knows, but we do have one thing. We have our own domestic energy source, wind—natural gas, wind, and solar. We should keep it here to protect ourselves. It will make us a better partner with the rest of the world. If we are totally strong, we can project our power diplomatically, economically much better than we are.

So for me this is a historic day. I understand what Big Oil wants to do. I understand what the Republicans want to do. Our leader HARRY REID did his absolute best to get the best deal he could for the renewable energy sources that we have, to stand up as long as he could these tax breaks. He did a good job, but the pressure was on him from the Republicans. Unfortunately, in this agreement, the wind and solar tax breaks will expire. Wind tax breaks expire very soon.

From my perspective, we should have this debate out here soon. We should have a debate about the Middle East. We should have a debate about oil, about our national security, about our role in the future. It is time for us to have the big debates out here, the big debates in prime time, with everyone participating and everyone understanding that the rest of this century is going to be about the United States over in the Middle East. Whether we

like it or not, from the day we invaded Iraq, that was our destiny. So let's have those big debates. In the center of that has to be oil and the revenues that are fueling so much of what is happening over there.

I thank the Presiding Officer for giving me the opportunity to speak today.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

OIL AND GAS EXPORTS

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I couldn't help overhearing my friend from Massachusetts talking about something really good that is going to happen; that is, we are going to lift the caps off our exports on oil and gas.

I just can't understand why we ever had caps on exports. It seems like this administration is perfectly willing not just to approve of but to encourage countries like Iran and Russia to export their oil and help them and yet preclude us from doing the same thing. Right now one of the problems we have with Russia is they have a hand up on us because there are so many countries over there dependent on them for their ability to have energy. It is just pretty amazing that is going on.

So I am really glad. Hopefully, this will go through. I know in my State of Oklahoma it has cost literally hundreds of jobs in just three companies because they could no longer afford to drill here.

That is a big issue. I remember I was invited to Lithuania back when the President of Lithuania wanted to dedicate and open their first terminal so that they would be able to import gas and oil, some of that being from us. Everyone there was so joyous of the fact that they were not going to have to rely on Russia any longer, that they could rely more on us. We do have friends out there whom we want to be able to take care of.

PARIS CLIMATE CHANGE AGREEMENT

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, this past weekend, the officials from the administration traveled 3,800 miles to Paris to attend the international climate negotiations in Paris. As a reminder, this is a program that has been going on now for 21 years. The ones who started this whole idea that the world is coming to an end because of global warming came from the United Nations.

I have gone to several of these meetings. I didn't go to this one because even John Kerry, our Secretary of State, said publicly that there is not going to be anything binding. If there is nothing binding, then why are they even there? In fact, it was interesting because when he made that statement, President Hollande of France was outraged. He said: He must have been confused when he said that. But that changed the whole thing. It was on November 11 that he made that statement.

Anyway, they went ahead and they had their 21st annual conference. I remember one of them I went to. I ran into a friend of mine from a West African country.

I said: Luke, what are you doing here? Why are you over here? You don't believe all this stuff, do you, on global warming?

He said: No, but we stand to be able to bring back literally billions of dollars to Benin, West Africa. Besides that, this is the biggest party of the year.

The worst thing they said happened at the South America meeting 3 years ago was they ran out of caviar. Anyway, we are paying for all that stuff. When they went over and said that wonderful things were going to happen in Paris, we knew it wasn't going to happen.

The COP21 conference has nothing do with saving the environment. With no means of enforcement and no guarantee of funding as developed countries had hoped, the deal will not reduce emissions and it will have no impact on global temperatures.

When they say they had this historic meeting, everyone was scratching their heads wondering: What happened? Did they win anything at all?

James Hansen is the scientist who is credited with being the father of global warming. I can remember when I got involved with the issue when they came back from Kyoto and wanted to ratify a treaty, and that was at the turn of the century, 1998. James Hansen has been working on global warming—he is a NASA scientist—for years. It goes all the way back to the eighties. He characterized what happened in an interview he had with the British newspaper the Guardian. He said the agreement is a fraud. Here is the guy who is the father of global warming, and he said it is a fraud and it doesn't accomplish anything. This is likely because the only guaranteed outcome from the Paris agreement is continued growth in emissions.

According to a study from the MIT Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Change, global emissions will increase by 63 percent through—that is assuming that everyone complies with their commitments, which obviously they will not and they can't—global emissions will increase by 63 percent through 2050 compared to the year 2010. By the end of this century, the MIT study projects, temperatures—if they were successful—would only be reduced by 0.2 degrees Celsius.

Even the 26 to 28 percent greenhouse gas emission reductions which President Obama committed to on this agreement is really a fraud. There is an environmentalist witness who came before our committee. He was the Sierra Club's former general counsel, and his name is David Bookbinder. He testified before the Senate Environment and Public Works committee—the one that I chair—this year saying that the President's power plan does not add up to the 26 to 28 percent target; it is totally unattainable.

When asked to explain the targets in corresponding regulatory actions to Congress, the key administration officials refused to do that.

In fact, something happened. It may be the first time this has happened. People wonder how the unelected bureaucracies go off and do things that are not in keeping with the majority of the American people, and we see this all the time. To preclude that from happening, every bureaucracy has a committee in the Senate and in the House that is supposed to be watching what they are doing and they are supposed to be overseeing. They have jurisdiction, just like my committee has jurisdiction over the EPA. I tried to get them to come in and tell us when it was announced by President Obama that they were going to propose the 26 to 28 percent reduction in greenhouse gases by 2025, and they refused to testify.

I would ask the Chair, in the years you have been here, have you ever seen a bureaucracy refuse to come before the committee that has the jurisdiction? They did. We are the authority in Congress to approve such—it has not only not pledged the money that has been committed as our price to pay, we haven't actually appropriated any money at all.

So while proclaimed as historic, this agreement did little to overcome the longstanding obstacle that has plagued international climate agreements from the start where responsibility is unequally divided between the developed and the developing world.

I can remember back in about 1999, I guess it was, around the Kyoto time, we had a vote here, and I was involved in that vote. It was called the Chuck Hagel and Bob Byrd vote. It said that if you come back from any of these places where you are putting this together with a treaty—whether it is Kyoto or another treaty—we will not vote to ratify a treaty that either is bad for the economy of America or doesn't treat China and the developing countries the same as it treats us. That passed 95 to 0. So when they go over and come back, it is dead on arrival. The thing is, everyone knows it except for the 192 countries that were over there. So we can't figure out why they would call this a historic event.

While the administration is pushing forward with economically disastrous climate regulations before the end of his Presidency, China gets to continue business as usual, including emissions growth through 2030—each year. That is about 15 years of increase. They

came back saying: Well, we have to increase our CO_2 emissions for 15 more years.

Yesterday morning, just 3 days after India signed off on the final Paris agreement, the Guardian—that is the big newspaper in London—reported that India is targeting to more than double its output of 1.5 billion tons through 2020 because ''coal provides the cheapest energy for rapid industrialization that would lift millions out of poverty.''

At the historic meeting they had, the top official from India's Coal Ministry said:

Our dependence on coal will continue. There are no other alternatives available.

India is not alone; there are numerous other countries that will continue to do that.

Even though the temperature level set is misleading, a 1.5-degree cap on global temperature increase is no more realistic or technologically feasible than the 2 degrees they used before this.

The fine print remains the same. For any agreement to have legal significance within the United States, it has to be ratified by the Senate. People in other countries don't know that. They think someone, particularly a very strong President like President Obama—that he can just pretty much mandate anything he wants. It doesn't work that way in the United States.

In what was literally the final hour—this is very interesting—they had to delay the announcement of their agreement by 2 hours because they wanted to make one change in the agreement. They had language that said ''developed country''—that is us, the United States—''parties shall continue taking the lead by undertaking economy-wide. . . .'' and then explained how to do it. They wanted to replace the ''shall'' with ''should'' because they discovered in their discussions that if they left ''shall'' in there, it would have to come to the U.S. Senate for ratification, and they would all be embarrassed because we would know what the results of that would be.

Missing from the administration's top 21 celebratory speeches is the fact that neither the American people nor the U.S. Senate supports the international agreement and that the centerpiece regulatory commitment—the so-called Clean Power Plan—faces significant legal obstacles in the Congress—in fact, not just obstacles, but it has already been voted on. There is a CRA—that is the Congressional Review Act—and the Congressional Review Act is saying that we are going to reject the Clean Power Plan, and it passed with an overwhelming majority of Democrats and Republicans in the House. What they agreed on has already been rejected.

Missing from almost all of the Paris agreement coverage before and after is that the basis for this agreement is not scientific but political. Ninety percent of the scientists do not believe the world is coming to an end because of global warming, as environmental NGOs and the U.S. administration officials claim.

A Wall Street Journal op-ed examined what constituted this misrepresentation of 97 percent. We always hear that 97 percent of the scientists say that this is true; it must be true. Anytime you have something that is unpopular, if you keep saying over and over again that the science is settled, a lot of people out there believes it is. But when they did the analysis of the 97 percent consensus and explained it, it was simply based on fractions of respondents. For example, in a commonly cited 2009 survey of over 3,100 respondents, only 79 were counted because they claimed their expertise was solely climate-related.

Well, the 97 percent consensus was reviewed just a few weeks ago by one of the news stations in their poll——

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 1 more minute.

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

Mr. INHOFE. The poll found that 97 percent of Americans don't care about global warming when stacked against issues such as terrorism, immigration, health care, and the economy. I remember when it used to be the No. 1 concern of Americans, and following the same March Gallup poll over the years, it has gone from No. 1 or No. 2 over that period of time to No. 15—dead last. They have a lot of work to do, and it is not going to work.

Before I yield the floor, let me thank my friend from Connecticut for all of his help last night. We worked late, and we did the right thing. I appreciate that very much.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am pleased and honored to follow my colleague from Oklahoma, and I extend my thanks to him for his cooperation on the legislation we did last night by unanimous consent, which I was pleased to support eventually and work with him to reach a resolution on.

(The further remarks of Mr. BLUMENTHAL are printed in today's RECORD during consideration of S. Res. 310.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

RECOGNIZING THE PEOPLE OF CAMPBELL COUNTY, WYOMING

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I recently traveled to my hometown of Gillette, WY. I am usually in Wyoming most weekends, but I get to my hometown only about every other month because I have a huge State to cover. I happened to get there when the senior citizens were having their annual crafts gala. As I wandered through, looking at all of the marvelous things they had done, I was shown a Christmas ornament specifically designed for our county. I was asked if I could take it and a message to our President. Of course I agreed, and today I want to share that message and that ornament with my fellow Senators.

That is what it looks like on the tree.

The letter says:

Dear Mr. President,

We seniors of Gillette, Campbell County, Wyoming, want to send you this Christmas ornament that reflects the support of many programs in our community. Without the coal and oil industries, Campbell County would not have such a wonderful school system or the outstanding programs for seniors. The Campbell County Senior Center provides hot lunches for seniors Monday through Friday and serves about 100 (or more) every day. It also offers numerous other activities such as ceramics, painting, exercise classes, social activities, computer classes, day trips to local points of interest, and assistance in completing forms for government programs. We feel the Campbell County Senior Center is the Cadillac of all senior centers.

The coal and oil industries not only support Campbell County but they support the whole State of Wyoming. Much of the tax dollars generated by the coal and oil industries are distributed throughout Wyoming. When your administration tries so hard to close down these industries, it not only affects the thousands of families in Campbell County but it affects the whole state. Although we realize there are valid concerns about global warming and environmental issues in our country, we want to testify that the coal and oil industries in our county are environmentally conscience and they work hard to beautify the land here.

The people of Wyoming not only receive but they also give freely. If there is anyone in need here, the people step forward and give their time, talents, and resources. If every state in this country would give as Wyoming does, there wouldn't be any hunger or homelessness.

We have enclosed some photos to show you a few of the programs offered to children, seniors, and families in Campbell County. We ask that you please take the time to look at them. We would also like to invite you to visit Campbell County to see the wonderful community we have. Visit our open-pit coal mines and our oil industry along with the various forms of wildlife that share this land.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to the concerned seniors of Gillette, Wyoming.

May God Bless You and Your Family!

The letter is dated November 17, 2015. At the end of the letter is a list of a number of the seniors who signed the letter. I ask unanimous consent that their names be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Thomas W. Procket, Sheryl Matthews, Nancy Pauluson, Rollie G. Banks, Zaigie Setterling, Marlene Jones, Debbie S. Schofield, Jeff Ketterling, Buede Jones, James Osborne, Camel A. Lipne, Naima Appel, Jim & Eseelle Hanson, Marian Neugebauer, Colleen Neese, Joann Gilliertson, Betty Lou Anderson, Norm Bennett, Marie Mortellaro, John P. McClellam, Mary Jo Younglund, Bradley Shane Anderson, Marie Tarno, Margret Chase, Barbara Rognnae, Laura Kerry, Bernie A. Darson, Bonnie Z. Namor, June Keeney, Kerolyn S. Jones, Allie Bratton.

Janel Laubach, I C. Hecht, Rhyllis Rae Alldekoven, Cathy Raney, Barbara

Leastmen, Patsy K. Drume, Susan Burke, Fred C. Smiley, Betty Beesley, Mary Ann Bourne, Renee Davis, Mary Frances Reest, Judy G. Deters, Andrew W. Deters, Glorienera H. Ceven, Lucille Gaungen, Belle Demple, Maria Case, Raymond Case, Bill & Elaine Sharpe, Rose & Fred Schave, Lloyd Derrick, J.W. Keeflang, Ruth Steffen, Gladys Pridgeon, John A. Hart, Fays Coleman.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I have taken a closer look at the ornament that they gave me to give to the President. We are not only the energy capital of Wyoming, but we are also the energy capital of the Nation. We produce 40 percent of the Nation's coal, and the reason we produce 40 percent of the Nation's coal is that this coal is cleaner than anywhere else. Powder River Basin coal is lower in sulfur and other chemicals, and they have even found ways to improve the way it operates. If some of the money from the Department of Energy were used as an incentive for cleaning up coal, it could be done much better.

Our university, again using money from the energy business, is also working on a few projects. One of them is to use solar power to separate hydrogen out of water and burn the hydrogen with coal to make it burn better and cleaner.

We have five powerplants in my county, and we love to talk people into coming to Campbell County. We are successful at getting senior staffers, from both Republican and Democratic offices, to come each year to take a look at what it is like in that part of the country. The biggest comment that all of them make as they leave is that they had no idea that it could be that clean. They thought the coal mines would be dirty.

I ran into that when I went to the first global warming conference in Japan. I went there early, as the negotiations were starting, and I guess I was one of the first people to show up in a suit, so people were leaping over tables and everything to interview me. I usually don't do that. I ask what their circulation is in Wyoming, and of course in Japan it was zero, so I didn't do any interviews. But one of the big papers in Tokyo was so interested that I wouldn't do an interview that they sent a reporter to Wyoming. They called first and asked if it would be OK if he came and traveled with me for a day. I said that it would be fine as long as he also visited a coal mine and powerplant.

He came and traveled with me, and he had no idea of the distances that we have between the few people that we have in Wyoming. We are the least populated State in the Nation. He also followed through on visiting the coal mine and powerplant. Again, he had the same comment. He couldn't believe it could be done so cleanly and so well.

In the early days of the coal mines coming in, people said they would never able to reclaim that land because we have such low moisture in Wyoming. We are actually considered high desert. In fact, the eastern part of that State has the most desert. God didn't put anything above the ground. He put it all under the ground, and part of it is coal under 80 feet of dirt, which is considered nothing in the coal mining business. So we have been able to mine the coal with this open pit and to reclaim it.

Now it is fun to take people out to see one of these mines because when you get to it, they say: Don't let them tear up that part over there. We say: That is where the mine used to be. This is where it is going to be. They then say: Oh, go ahead and tear that up because it looks better after they put everything back in its place.

It could be done better yet, but there are some requirements in the reclamation that it has to be put back the way that it was, and that puts some constraints on it. Nobody would move millions of tons of dirt on a farm or ranch and put it back exactly the way it was, down to where the rocks are placed.

We have a product that is used nationally and that the Chinese would like to use. Did you know that during the Olympic games in China they had to fire out rockets that would go to a fairly high altitude and then spread out some chemicals that would clean the air so that it would look nice on television? They are extremely interested in getting Campbell County coal shipped to them so they can burn that in their powerplants and clean their air.

It is the least expensive form of energy there is, and I am talking about just one of the forms of energy. We also have oil, which results in natural gas and coalbed methane. This little symbol is a uranium symbol. We also produce most of the Nation's uranium in our county. That could be used more extensively to provide clean power and as a source for agriculture as well, including raising bison.

So I wanted to share this Christmas ornament with all of my colleagues and echo what the seniors have said and suggest that America is the most innovative country in the world and if we have a problem, we can solve it. A little bit of incentive can go a long way. We are an inventive country. A little bit of incentive has gone a long way a lot of times.

We actually have had some private companies that are talking about restocking the space station. We have the plane that was powered by bicycle pedals that crossed the English Channel. If we can do those sorts of things, there is no limit to what can be done.

We have to quit discouraging inventiveness and encourage the use of the resources we have.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business for such time as I consume, not to exceed 30 minutes.

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

OMNIBUS SPENDING BILL

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I rise to address the 2,000-page, trillion-dollar-plus, year-end omnibus spending bill—drafted behind closed doors, away from public view, with only a limited number of people involved. Members of the Senate and Members of the House were unaware of what deals were being cut and what decisions were being made. I believe it contains provisions that will cause material harm to American workers—I just do—and to matters involving this legislation that I have worked on for years. I am very disappointed. Actually, I am deeply disappointed.

This bill contains dramatic changes to Federal immigration law that would increase, by as much as four-fold, the number of low-wage foreign workers provided to employers under the controversial H–2B visa program. It has been a matter of controversy for a number of years. It has been added to this bill without hearings and without an open process in the Senate. These foreign workers are brought in exclusively to fill blue-collar, low-wage, nonfarm jobs—not agricultural jobs—in hotels and in restaurants and on construction sites, in amusement parks, landscaping, truck driving, and in many other occupations—jobs being sought by millions of Americans around this country. Millions are taking those jobs every day.

When we go into hotels and restaurants, are not Americans doing those jobs? H–2B workers are supposed to be here to fill seasonal jobs that Americans allegedly ''won't do.'' That is what they say—those who want more, cheaper labor.

Even those they are supposed to be temporary positions, foreign H–2B workers are allowed to bring their spouses and their children with them—which, of course, results in costs being incurred by local communities, hospitals, and schools across the country. Although the alien's spouse and children are not supposed to work in the United States, I don't think anyone is under the illusion that this administration has any intention—or previous ones, for that matter—to do anything to stop them from working if they want to, nor will they be deported if they violate the terms of their employment, nor will they be removed if they overstay the visa they have been given.

Hotels have good jobs. Construction has good jobs. As to landscaping, there is a group that does my lawn in Alabama. Three African-American men come out and work on our lawn in a fairly short period of time, using good equipment. The head person is in his 40s and had 20 years in the Army. What do people mean that Americans won't do this work?

At a time of record immigration, we do not appreciate the scope of it. We already have the highest number of foreign-born individuals in American history. We are not against immigration. Immigration is a positive thing—properly conducted. Good people come into

America. But we are at record levels both in total numbers and, in a few years, the highest percentage of foreign-born in America will be reached, and it will continue thereafter. So is it any wonder that 83 percent of the electorate wants immigration either frozen or reduced?

The Republican-led Congress is about to deliver the President a fourfold increase in one of the most controversial foreign worker programs we have. In fact, it is a much larger version of a proposal that was contained in the Gang of 8 comprehensive immigration bill that was rejected by the American people and the House of Representatives just 2 years ago. The result is higher unemployment and lower wages for Americans. The free market controls—more labor, lower wage; more labor, less job opportunity. It is indisputable.

The Economic Policy Institute has noted: ''Wages were stagnant or declining for workers in all of the top 15 H–2B occupations between 2004 and 2014,'' and ''unemployment rates increased in all but one of the top 15 H–2B occupations between 2004 and 2014, and all 15 occupations averaged a very high unemployment rate . . . Flat and declining wages, coupled with such high unemployment rates over such a long period of time, suggests a loose labor market and an over-supply of workers rather than an under supply.''

I think that is a fact. Our free market friends ought to understand that.

It is worth noting that the civilian labor force participation rate is currently at around 62.5 percent, a low that we have not seen in nearly four decades. Labor participation rate means the percentage of workers in the working ages that actually have a job. It is the lowest rate we have had in four decades.

Nevertheless, despite this low labor force participation rate, this provision in the omnibus bill would exempt from the statutory limit, which is now 66,000 H–2B workers a year—any worker who was present in the United States during the three previous years. Thus, instead of 66,000 foreign workers, the bill would allow up to 264,000 foreign workers to be present in the United States on H–2B visas. That is over a quarter of a million low-wage, low-skilled workers brought in to occupy blue-collar jobs. That may be good for certain businesses that now have a large number of workers, because they don't have to raise wages and change working conditions and raise benefits to attract and keep workers. They can just bring in people from abroad who are thankful to get any good cash-income job at lower wages.

This is bad for struggling American workers trying to get by and take care of their families. It is particularly bad, as economist after economist has shown, for minorities, including African Americans and Hispanics, and recent immigrants who are here lawfully looking to try to get a little better wage with a little better retirement and health care benefits. This is going to help them? Give me a break.

On top of this provision, this omnibus bill approves, without any conditions—the President's request for increased refugee admissions, allowing him to bring in as many refugees as he wants. He can do that. It is hard to believe, but he is allowed to do so. He simply has to notify Congress of how many he intends to admit. He can bring them from anywhere he wants and allow them access to unlimited welfare and entitlements at the taxpayers' expense, which is not scored as a cost.

At the Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest that I chair, we had an official from Health and Human Services who testified that 75 percent of the refugees are self-sustaining within 180 days. But my staff helped me to ask the follow-up question. What we found was that means Health and Human Services is no longer giving them refugee money, but that other kinds of welfare don't count against them. But 93 percent, we know, of immigrants from the Middle East between 2009 and 2013 are on food stamps, and 73 percent are on Medicaid or health care programs. And they may be there the rest of their lives.

This is not being scored. This is why a country that is smart seeks to bring in people who have the greatest chance of being successful.

Sure, some will do well, and many are wonderful people, and we have a tradition of that. I am just saying that we have a President with unlimited powers who has an agenda, and he is passing on the costs that are going to be to the detriment of working Americans for decades to come.

So the risks associated with the refugee admissions program are significant.

With respect to Syria, FBI Director James Comey repeatedly said that we simply do not have the ability to vet refugees from Syria. Testifying before the House Committee on Homeland Security in October, he said:

> We can only query against that which we have collected. So if someone has never made a ripple in the pond in Syria in a way that would get their identity or their interests reflected in our database, we can query our database until the cows come home, but we are not going to. There will be nothing to show up because we have no record on that person.

Well, that is absolutely correct. Of course, that is correct. But they tried to tell us in Committee that we are going to do biometric checks. So I proceeded to ask repeatedly, and finally, after the most difficult time, they acknowledged they have no database in Syria to check biometrics against. It is not like the United States: If you are caught by the police, they take your fingerprints, and they can tell whether you were convicted in Maine, Alabama, or California. It is in the computer system. They don't have that in Syria. So that was a misrepresentation, an attempt to mislead and create false confidence in the American people that we have an ability to vet people coming here from Syria—an ability we don't have. The FBI Director honestly and directly stated that.

Any claims made by others that refugees in the United States never engage in acts of terrorism are demonstrably false. Just a few weeks ago, I identified a list of at least 12 individuals who were admitted to the United States as refugees, but who have been implicated in terrorism in the last year alone.

We found out there may be more, and probably they are under investigation right now. In fact, the FBI has said there is a terrorism investigation in every single State in America. These terrorists, for example, are from Somalia, Bosnia, Kenya and Uzbekistan. They came in different stages in their lives. Some were admitted as children, others as adults. Yet they all turn their backs on this country after being welcomed here as refugees.

This is not made up. It is a real problem. The American people want some action. They would like to see Congress and this Administration respond, especially, and they are rightly angered and upset with their elected representatives and their President for not taking sufficient action.

I, along with my colleague Senator SHELBY and others in the House, asked for inclusion of specific language in this omnibus bill that would protect the interests of the American people, that would reassert the constitutional role of Congress in establishing a uniform system of immigration, that would require the identification of offsetting cuts in Federal spending to pay for the refugee admission program. But none of that was included in the omnibus bill.

I doubt they ever spent a minute looking at a letter from two Senators. As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest, I sent appropriators a list of several dozen provisions for inclusion in our funding bills to improve immigration enforcement and to block Presidential overreach and lawlessness, including among other things, provisions to defund sanctuary cities.

Why should we be funding and providing Federal law enforcement money to cities that won't cooperate with the Federal Government in its most basic responsibility of respect and comity between these various Federal and State agencies. It goes on every day. But we are being blocked in sanctuary city after sanctuary city.

Also, I asked the appropriators to prevent visas from being issued to nationals of countries that refuse to take back their criminals. This is important. My former colleague Senator Specter offered a bill for a number of things. It would bar admission for certain visas for nationals of countries that won't take back their people who have been in the United States. It is a fundamental principle of immigration

law worldwide that if you admit a person from a foreign country, when their visa is up, they go home. Their visa is up if they commit a crime, and they are to be sent back home; they are to be deported.

But country after country is refusing to take back their convicted criminals. I guess they figure: ''Why don't you keep our criminals for us?'' But that is not what the law is, and we are stuck with them in jails. We have to pay for their housing. After 6 months, absent certain circumstances, the Supreme Court says they generally have to be released. It's possible that if an alien files a habeas petition that the government will have to go to court and have hearing with a judge. This is driving up costs, using incredible amounts of hours. We shouldn't tolerate it one minute. There is no reason that this government shouldn't act—which the law will now allow and directly says they should do—to refuse to issue visas to a country that won't take back their criminals. They refuse to do it. There is additional legislation that would force that, and we could have done it in this bill. It should have bipartisan support.

I also asked for language in the bill to defund the unlawful, improper Executive amnesty. The President's actions are unlawful. We don't have to fund his unlawful activity. There is no duty on behalf of Congress to acquiesce and provide money to people to work in a big building in Crystal City to process millions of people in the country illegally for amnesty because the President now says: ''I am just going to let them stay.'' It has been blocked for the most part by a Federal court, but there is nothing in the bill to expressly defund it.

I asked for legislation to protect American workers against abuses in the H–1B program. This is where Southern California Edison had a program. They brought in 500 foreign workers from India in some sort of contract deal, had the American workers who had been at Edison doing computer work for years train the new workers, and then ended up terminating the Americans and replacing them with those from abroad. How can anyone say there was a shortage of workers? The same was done by Disney. Senator NELSON of Florida and I introduced legislation to fix that. I have introduced legislation with Senator CRUZ and supported legislation from Senator GRASSLEY to fix this program. None of that has been included in this bill. Why not?

I asked for an expansion of the 287(g) program that allows Federal law enforcement officials and officers to assist with enforcing our immigration law. This was a good program. It had been on the books. President Bush finally began to expand it. They train local law officers for weeks at a time, and they become extensions of Federal law enforcement officers to help identify and process people who are unlawfully in the country and who have been apprehended—a very good program that had good results. This Obama Administration has eviscerated it. It is less than half of what it was. It should have been expanded all over America, if you actually want the law enforced in this country. But if you don't want the law enforced in America, you kill a program like 287(g). Did the appropriators put in the omnibus bill anything to deal with that abuse? No.

We put in language that would prevent illegal aliens from receiving tax credits. This is unbelievable. The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration from President Obama's own Treasury Department has done an analysis of this and urged that it be fixed. People come to America illegally, with children somewhere around the world. They don't have a Social Security number. They use an ITIN identification document—which was intended for executives. They use that, and they file a tax return. They don't pay taxes because their income is low, but they get a tax credit based on children that are not even in the country.

How abusive is that? I understand this was rejected and was not in the omnibus bill because President Obama didn't want it. So he gets to dictate what is in a congressional bill that I think would have 90-percent support by the American people if they understood how significant it was? That is a different figure, but it is an abusive, improper tax credit.

So all of these provisions were rejected by the bill supporters.

But industry's request for more foreign workers was granted—unconditionally approved. So I asked about this provision. I heard it might be under consideration, so I asked about it. I said: ''The American people don't want a fourfold increase in immigration. I know there are some special interests pushing for this. I have heard that. Tell me it is not so.'' I was told it wasn't so. But last night—this morning at 2 a.m.—when the bill was produced, it was in there. So I am not happy about it, colleagues. I don't see how we can operate around here if we can't rely on representations.

Because of this bill, sanctuary cities will continue to get Federal funds, the Obama Administration can continue issuing visas to countries that refuse to repatriate their criminal aliens, and the President's Executive amnesty continues.

Meanwhile, the tax bill that will be moved with the omnibus bill makes permanent the Additional Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit, but it does nothing to block their future distribution to illegal aliens. A tax credit to a person who doesn't pay taxes is a check from the government. It is not a tax deduction; it is a direct payment. It scores as a welfare benefit. This means more illegal aliens will continue to get tax credits. It should be stopped.

As I feared, the ultimate effect—and I have expressed concern about this for some months now—is that this bill will fund the President's entire lawless immigration agenda. The only real bill we have to provide an opportunity to legislate and fix some of these things is a big omnibus bill. And what does it do? It funds essentially the President's entire agenda.

In fact, the omnibus spending bill will ensure that at least—for example, we have had discussions about the Middle East. People argue that we are not letting in enough people from the Middle East, and that we shouldn't talk about a pause. But under this bill it would ensure that at least 170,000 green cards—that means permanent residency with a guaranteed path to citizenship—and refugee and asylee approvals will be issued to migrants from Muslim countries just over the next 12 months. We are very generous about this, and it is very difficult to know if we are managing this properly, except that we know it is not being safely monitored, and the FBI Director has told us so.

This bill even fails to address substantial problems with the EB–5 investment visa program, problems that some of my colleagues have worked for months to resolve. The problems with this program have been documented by the Government Accountability Office and the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General, not the least of which are issues related to fraud and national security. We can fix that program. We need to do it. This would have been a good opportunity.

For years the American people have suffered under the lawless, dangerous, and wage-reducing immigration policies of this administration. They sent us here to Washington to protect their interests, to protect the people's interests, to ensure the defense of their families, and to advance the common good—the public interest. They did not send us here to bow down to the President's lawless immigration policies, nor to line the pockets of special interests in big business. That is not what we are here for.

Whom do we represent?

This bill explains why Republican and Democratic voters are in open rebellion, as former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich said recently—open rebellion. They elected people whom they believed were going to take action to protect their security, their jobs, and their wages. And what do they get? A bill that is worse than current law. It goes in the opposite direction—no wonder people are upset.

This legislation represents a further disenfranchisement of the American voter. What does a vote mean in this country? At a time when hundreds of thousands of criminal aliens are on our streets, criminal aliens are killing innocent Americans, numerous foreign-born individuals are implicated in terrorism, tens of thousands of aliens from Central America continue to stream across our southern border, countless Americans are being replaced

by foreign workers and forced to train their replacements, and millions of Americans are just struggling to get by, this Congress has chosen to make things worse.

We need to remember whom we represent and whom our duty is to. Our duty is to voters, the American people, not the interests of businesses, activist groups, and that kind of thing.

I appreciate the opportunity to share these remarks. I have been very firm about my statements here, but I am very unhappy about this bill. I do not believe this is the kind of legislation we should be moving. It was not moved in the normal process on the floor of the Senate, where amendments could be offered and a bill could be studied over months of time before final passage, perhaps. So with regret and a good deal of frustration, I urge my colleagues to oppose and reject this proposal.

I would also just mention one more thing, and then I will wrap up. Senator SHELBY and I wrote a letter to the Appropriations Committee on November 16, asking for Congress to assume its constitutional duty ensuring immigration laws are uniform by approving the number of refugees who come to America, and not leave that as an open-ended power given to the President, who can execute it in an arbitrary manner.

We also said that no benefits should be provided to future refugees until the Congressional Budget Office submits a score—a simple report on the cost of this program. How long would it take? Not that long. Don't we need to have a score, a cost number?

We also asked that no refugees be admitted until the Department of Homeland Security submits a report on terrorist and criminal refugees.

None of those provisions were included in any of the legislation before us. I think all of those are logical.

I also previously wrote letters asking for other provisions, such as prohibiting funds for lawsuits against States that are trying to help enforce immigration laws, to bar funds for attorneys for illegal aliens through these grant programs that are being utilized. Fundamentally, it has never been the responsibility of the Federal Government to prepare and provide free attorneys for people who have entered the country illegally. It never has been the law.

I also asked that no funds be provided for sanctuary cities.

I asked for language that prohibited funds for Executive amnesty policies; that prohibited funds for the DACA Program; that there would be no spending of funds in the Immigration Examinations Fee Account for anything other than naturalization and immigration benefits provided by Congress.

I asked for language that would bar funds for salaries of political appointees or other employees who direct employees to violate the law. Why should we be paying people who direct their own subordinates to violate fundamental provisions of immigration law?

I asked for language that would prevent funds from being used to grant ''prosecutorial discretion'' to aliens in removal proceedings, no funds for an extension of Temporary Protected Status unless approved by Congress, and no funds to continue the Administration's abuse of the parole authority. We shouldn't be funding these abusive practices that undermine the certainty of immigration laws.

I asked for language to prohibit funds to grant H–1B visas to companies that have replaced American workers. I asked for restrictions on the issuance of Employment Authorization Documents, and that no funds be used to add new countries to the Visa Waiver Program until implementation of a biometric exit system.

This bill does direct some money to a biometric exit system, which, if this Administration would act, would begin to do something significant. But they have resisted what the 9/11 Commission has said we must have. When people come into the country, they are checked in, they are fingerprinted, and they are biometrically identified, but nobody checks if they left. So you can come into America on a visa and never go home. This is why almost half of the people illegally in America today came lawfully on a visa. They just didn't return when they were supposed to.

I asked for money to establish—notably, there has been an advocacy unit in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the past to protect illegal immigrants and give them all kinds of additional rights—an advocacy unit for victims of immigrant crimes.

I asked for others, too.

I would just say that I, and others, have raised a series of important issues that need to be fixed, and would receive, if understood by the American people, 90 percent support. Senator GRASSLEY, chairman of the Judiciary Committee—of which my Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest, is a part—has also been active in these things. It is a deep disappointment that this last piece of legislation that could make some improvement in a number of these issues will do nothing of significance, but it will increase by four-fold the number of low-skilled, low-wage workers allowed to enter this country from 66,000 to 264,000. They will pull down wages and reduce the job prospects of struggling Americans.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEE). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

WILDFIRE PROVISIONS IN THE OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, most of us are busy today reviewing the contents of the Omnibus appropriations bill that was released late last night—actually, early this morning. I come to the floor this afternoon with my colleague from Washington, the ranking member on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, to speak about the wildfire provisions. More specifically, I am here to explain why Congress chose not to accept a flawed proposal from the administration and really, I think, to be here to give hope and optimism about a path forward for next year.

I think it goes without saying that our Nation's wildfire epidemic is a serious challenge that demands attention from each one of us. Each year the wildfire season seems to include new ''worsts'' and shattered records, and 2015 has been particularly devastating. It seems as though we didn't have a wildfire season; we've had a wildfire year. We all know that we have seen too much acreage burn, too many western communities have suffered damage, and, tragically, lives have been lost.

According to the National Interagency Fire Center, more than 9.4 million acres of our country had burned through October 30 of this year. In Alaska, where most of these fires occur, we lost over 5 million acres during this period. For perspective, that is about the size of the State of Connecticut. That is what we saw burn in Alaska alone this year.

Those of us whose States are impacted by wildfire started this year in agreement that the way wildfire management has been funded is broken; and that it is past time we fix it. We know we can't continue to underfund fire suppression, only then to scramble to borrow money to fight fires—and all this while the fires are many times burning out of control. We know that we need to end this very disruptive and unsustainable cycle of fire borrowing, which drains funds from other programs as agencies desperately seek resources. I think this fire borrowing concept is one area where we have all been able to come together, whether it is those within the agencies or those of us looking to address policy, the appropriators. We have to figure out how we are going to stop the fire borrowing that goes on within the various accounts in an effort to respond to these wildfires.

Earlier this year, as the chairman of the Interior-Environment Appropriations Subcommittee, I set out to fix this very broken system. Under my direction, our committee reported a bill to do just that. The Interior appropriations bill included a permanent, fiscally responsible fix for fire borrowing. It would have provided resources to the agencies up front—enough funding to fully cover the average annual cost of firefighting over the past 10 years—while allowing for a limited cap adjustment in have truly catastrophic fire

years. The bill simultaneously increased funding for fire prevention efforts and took steps also to return to active forest management.

We thought this was not only a sound approach to address the fire borrowing but also the forest management issues that so many of us are concerned about. Unfortunately, we ran into a wall with the House of Representatives. They wouldn't accept the language because of its limited cap adjustment. Instead, we worked across Chambers within the Appropriations Committee to provide an unprecedented level of funding to address wildfire in this omnibus.

As I said, I am still going through the omnibus myself and trying to figure out whether to support the overall bill. But I do think it is important to recognize and understand what we have included in this omnibus. The wildfire provisions are both responsible and pragmatic. It provides real money, right now and gives us the time to develop long term real solutions. The bill includes $1.6 billion for fire suppression, which is $600 million over the average cost of fighting wildfires over the past 10 years. It also includes $545 million for hazardous fuels reduction, and it includes $360 million for the Forest Service's timber program, which will help us resume the active management of our forests.

What we have in this omnibus bill is more funding for wildfires than was spent during the 2015 fire season—and, again, that was one of the most expensive fire seasons in history. When we think about what we have done, barring a truly record-setting fire season in 2016, fire borrowing should not be an issue for us the rest of this fiscal year. We did this the right way—the way that Congress should deal with the government's responsibilities—by making cuts elsewhere to pay for this within the budget. Again, this is real money. This is money that will be available immediately because we have done this through the appropriations process.

We have had many conversations—Senator CANTWELL and I and many in this body—with Members who were hoping to see a different proposal. The House had a proposal, colleagues here in the Senate had a proposal, and the administration had a proposal. They were hoping it could be factored into the omnibus, but for a number of reasons it was not included within the bill.

The administration's proposal would have amended the Stafford Act to expand the purposes for emergency funding for major disasters to include fighting wildfires on Federal lands. The House included a similar idea in a forestry bill it passed earlier in the year. The irony here is that the Administration came out very strongly against this back in July, just a few months ago. The President's advisers issued a Statement of Administration Policy objecting to the repurposing of the Stafford Act and the use of the Disaster Relief Fund for wildfire suppression operations.

In September, the director of FEMA wrote an opinion piece about this. He said that tapping the Disaster Relief Fund for wildfires would ''undermine the federal government's ability to budget for and fund responses to disasters, as well as to finance state and tribal public infrastructure recovery projects.''

The Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the head of the Office of Management and Budget echoed that concern in a letter where they said, ''We do not believe that Congress should modify the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act as a means to address the escalating costs of wildfire.''

Yet here we are just a few months later, and the administration is now proposing to amend the Stafford Act. And after reviewing the proposal, it appears to be nothing more than a workaround that still has serious problems.

I think the first important reminder is that the Stafford Act itself is designed to provide Federal assistance to State, local, and tribal governments to alleviate disaster suffering and facilitate recovery after a disaster has occurred. There is no precedent for accessing it to provide emergency money for disasters on Federal lands.

The second concern we have is that this proposal doesn't actually end fire borrowing. What it does is create an account that is separate from the Disaster Relief Fund that is subject to appropriations, which means that it is now empty. That fund may be there, but there is nothing in it, and it could remain empty. There is no guarantee that appropriators will fund the account or that the President will ever request funds for it. And if there are no funds in the account, then basically what we have to assume is that the agencies are going to have to borrow again. So we haven't fixed the borrowing.

We have an average of 68,000 fires each year. Under this proposal, each one could require a separate Presidential declaration once the initial appropriations run out. So we have to ask the question: How does this actually work? Does the Forest Service Chief have to estimate how much each fire is going to cost? What happens in the meantime while you have all these fires burning? Again, the agencies are going to be in a situation where they are going to be forced to fire borrow.

Even if we assume that Federal dollars will be appropriated to the fund envisioned by this proposal and that the President will make disaster declarations after he is asked to do so by Cabinet officials, we are still setting another troubling precedent. The administration will effectively be able to decide to give itself money under the Stafford Act. This is not like giving an individual money after they have suffered a disaster, a loss to their home or property; this is the administration being able to decide to give itself money. So the question is, is this really something that we want to do?

Finally, I think this proposal is a missed opportunity. It was supposed to be coupled with a set of productive forest management reforms. What we saw is a good start. There are forest reforms in there but there is not very much in this to get excited about for Alaska, where we have both a wildfire problem and a timber problem. The proposal also does too little to help our firefighters or our communities which are at physical risk from wildfires and economic risk from restrictions on timber harvesting.

I am certainly not alone in this. Again, Senator CANTWELL has spoken very passionately on this issue—not only in committee but here on the floor. I am going to yield to her in just a moment.

We heard from a representative from the International Association of Fire Chiefs, who said that ''due to the rapidly rising cost of wildland fire suppression, IAFC [the International Association of Fire Chiefs] is concerned that the [Disaster Relief Fund] could run out of money as it is also used to address hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and other emergencies.''

We have also heard from a nonprofit organization called Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology. Their letter to congressional leaders observes that ''allowing agencies to declare wildfires as disasters simply to access near-unlimited funding for suppression will undermine efforts that have been long in the making to shift agencies toward alternative proactive strategies in fire preparedness and planning, fuels reduction and forest restoration.''

I want to find a solution to the fire-budgeting problem as much as anyone in this Chamber, but the proposal that surfaced during budget negotiations was not the right way to go. It was not developed in the open and transparent manner that we would hope, and it has not been fully vetted. It has drawn opposition not only from Members here but from outside groups whose members are on the ground actually fighting these fires. So the only solution was to do what we have done, which is fully fund firefighting within the budget that we were given.

The omnibus is our path forward on wildfire funding for this year. It devotes greater resources to fire prevention and hazardous fuels reduction and contains real money—not an empty account—that will be available immediately. We can use the window it provides to develop long-term solutions.

This is where I want to give encouragement to other Members. I am committed, as I know that Senator CANTWELL is, to working to address the longer term solutions to these issues. I am here today to affirm that wildfire management legislation will be a top priority for those of us on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee next year.

I know we come at this from different perspectives, but that is OK. Let's bring our different perspectives and work collaboratively with all Members to develop a commonsense bill that properly addresses the challenges and concerns that Senator CANTWELL has articulated when it comes to active forest management, how we deal with our hazardous fuels, and how we work on the front end to prevent these catastrophic fires. We need to be working together toward these solutions, and I certainly make that commitment with my ranking member to advance early on in the New Year these provisions that I think will make a difference.

I know Senator CANTWELL wants to be part of the solution here and she has played a great part as we have worked together to craft a solution in the committee. With that, I know that from the Energy and Natural Resources Committee perspective, we have a lot on our plate. But I think that from my perspective as a Senator from Alaska, this is an issue that the people in my State feel very passionately about.

I will ask Senator CANTWELL, as we deal with the pressing issues that are before us, is this an area where we can come together as an energy committee to address these very immediate concerns?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, responding to my colleague from Alaska—and I will make a longer statement in a second—I do want to thank her for her leadership, not just as chairwoman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, but also as the chairwoman of the Appropriations Interior subcommittee.

Thank you for your detailing exactly why it is so important to have real money up front. You are right. For you and me and for many Western States, we have seen a change in fire habit, and we have seen probably two of the worst fire seasons our country has seen in many years and the fact that this year's season may trump that.

It is very important that we give the agencies the tools to address this issue and that we give them the tools now—not a guessing game, not how much they might get or how much they might borrow but how much they have now. I think the 50-percent increase is a recognition of how dire the situation is and makes sure that these communities know that they get those resources.

Yes, I wish to thank the chairwoman for allowing the committee to have a hearing. Senator BARRASSO participated at a very critical moment and at a very sad moment because it was just days after we learned that we lost firefighters in the central part of our State.

I wish to say that she has had a committee hearing. We have had committee hearings. My staff attended what was called the Wildfire and Us Summit. Many people in the central part of our State participated in that summit. Your question is, Is this important to us? I think when you have a rain forest that catches on fire or you have parts of Alaska that have never burned that are up in smoke, you bet this is of critical importance to both our States and to many Western States. I thank you for the question and thank you for helping to get real resources on the table and a 50-percent increase over last year's fire budget. Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I know that Senator CANTWELL has a longer statement that she would like to make at this point in time.

I yield to Senator CANTWELL.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I thank my colleague Senator MURKOWSKI for her leadership on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and I thank the Senator for her discussion on fighting wildfires in the United States of America. I think she gave a great rendition. My hat is off to appropriators. I can tell you this: What we need is real money, and that is what she has provided. I thank her for that.

I thank her partner on the subcommittee, Senator UDALL from New Mexico. They worked together and had to provide a framework in which the omnibus reflects an appropriation that we will vote on later this week containing $1.6 billion for fire funding and fire suppression. That is $500 million more than last year. So I consider it a very good down payment.

Congress has recognized that it is very important to provide funding for fire suppression and at sufficient levels so that agencies can address the issues of prevention and hazardous fuel reduction. This is something. It is critically important.

I am pleased that this is a very large increase in firefighting accounts this year. Besides the 50-percent increase in fire suppression, as my colleague mentioned, there is $375 million in hazardous fuel reduction and new grants to local communities to decrease their fire hazards, additional fuel reduction projects such as controlled burns in our forests, and research on protecting homes during massive wildfires.

This is critically important to my State, as they have implemented many programs over the last two seasons that they call ''hasty response'' or fuel reduction, where they have been able to show that certain treatments have actually been able to save communities and neighborhoods that have done such treatment. The challenge becomes this: How do you educate the rest of the community, the rest of the State, on the vital importance of doing this fuel reduction? It is very important that we continue this.

I thank again the chairwoman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the interior subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations on the fact that this is real money today, a 50-percent increase without the necessity for a future declaration of disaster, without a future appropriations request, without pitting States against each other on every disaster, but providing some predictability with this increase about how to move forward for the 2016 firefighting season.

It is very important, as she mentioned, that we continue to focus on a variety of issues and resolutions: stopping the way that we continue to erode funds from other accounts while ensuring there are considerations of cost and oversight for large and expensive fires, integrating forest research to better prioritize where prevention money goes, increasing controlled burns on our Federal lands, ensuring personnel and equipment can operate seamlessly across jurisdictions during wildfires, funding community preparedness and FireWise activities, funding risk mapping, providing technology on all large fires to ensure managers know in real time the location of the fires and of our firefighters, and upgrading our air tanker system.

We saw a lot of this, and we heard a lot about our air tanker system during our committee hearings and that there was much more we could be doing.

As to establishing surge capacity, we heard a lot from our local communities that joined in the fight and are more than willing to join in this effort of helping us fight wildfires, but we need to have the capacity and the training.

As to ensuring communications, nothing was more frustrating in some of these wildfires than to have no broadband communication and yet to be in charge of all the evacuation for the region without the ability to communicate to the people that needed to be evacuated. It is critically important that we have on-the-ground communications systems available on day one.

Doing preventative treatments when risks are low is a particular issue for our State. We want to make sure that we have cooperation in working with other agencies. We don't want to do fire treatments when we are in drought conditions and high temperatures and dry, dry conditions, but when there are less risks.

We want to do mapping to clearly identify where the risks are, and we want to use technology for safety and effectiveness, such as GPS and other systems that can be used from the air, and modifying the individual assistance program. I say that because various communities that have been hardest hit by our fires have been in rural communities, but the way the definition works under our current law basically has prejudice against a community if it is not dense enough to meet the current requirement.

I wish to say that the ranking member, myself, and probably even the Presiding Officer have very rural communities that can be devastated by fires. That means an entire community that may be based on recreation or outdoors

or any kinds of outdoor activities could be so devastated and yet would be left without the resources, simply because they didn't meet a population density number. To me, we need to address this because these communities are integral parts of our larger United States and the economic stability of many of our States.

We want to continue to make these improvements in our system. As I said, the chairwoman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee allowed several hearings to take place, and we want to continue the efforts in working with our colleagues to make sure that we are moving forward on this issue in providing all the resources that we can.

I wish to address one issue, and that is that we are not going to get this overall solution by simply clearcutting large swaths of land in which we haven't made the right assessments. I say that because we have had so many issues in the State of Washington where dangerous erosion has taken place in those circumstances, but it is clear that we all agree that massive fuel reduction does need to take place.

I look forward to working with my colleague on that because there are many ways in which we can prevent and fight our national wildland fires. I look forward to working with Senator MURKOWSKI, and I thank her for getting us real money—a 50-percent increase—that doesn't require another declaration, doesn't require a future event. It is there, and we can start using it. Let's go to work with our colleagues in defining how we do hazardous fuel reduction in the most aggressive way possible, giving our communities better tools to fight these fires in the future, and working to make sure that we have the best equipment and the best resources for those individuals who are fighting those fires.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I want to thank the Senator from Washington for not only her comments here this evening but for her leadership and guidance in this area. When your State is hard hit by these disasters, you learn a lot. You learn a lot about what works in the process and, unfortunately, what doesn't work. When you cannot get a cat to run a fire break because it doesn't have the appropriate card or designation, people come to us and say: Well, that is crazy. And you have to agree; it is crazy. We can do better. When we are talking about the issue of wildland fire and management, it is this management piece that I really hope we can get to, because it is not just about throwing more money at the fires and hoping that we get it right. It is not only about ensuring that we prioritize and get it right with suppression dollars, but also that we are working aggressively to deal with the prevention, with hazardous fuels reduction, with actively managing these issues. That is how we are going to be making the headway. That is where we need to be working collaboratively, whether you are from a very open, remote, and large State such as Alaska or whether you are a State that sees smaller fires that have a catastrophic impact on your local economies. I know that Senator CANTWELL has articulated that very, very clearly within the committee.

We have our work cut out in front of us. I worked on a statement that included no shortage of fire puns and needing to put a damper on this 10-alarm fire that was out there, but I decided that the issue of fire was not a joke or a laughing matter for anybody.

We have a lot of work to do, and I am ready to do it. I am rolling up my sleeves and looking forward to a lot of cooperation from my colleagues as we address this very important priority.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

MAKING FURTHER CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2016

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.J. Res. 78, which was received from the House; that the joint resolution be read a third time and the Senate vote on passage of the resolution with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the joint resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (H.J. Res. 78) making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2016, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the joint resolution.

The joint resolution was ordered to a third reading and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate on the joint resolution?

If not, the joint resolution having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the joint resolution pass?

The joint resolution (H.J. Res. 78) was passed.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be made and laid upon the table.

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

SIGNING AUTHORITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the majority leader be authorized to sign duly enrolled bills or joint resolutions on Wednesday, December 16.

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

Ms. MURKOWSKI. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO NEW ZEALAND AMBASSADOR MICHAEL MOORE

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, my friend Chairman HATCH and I rise today to offer our sincere gratitude to Ambassador Michael Moore of New Zealand who is returning to his home country after more than 5 years here in Washington and a long, successful career as a beloved public servant.

With roots as a union organizer, he rose to become Prime Minister of New Zealand and later served as a Director-General of the World Trade Organization. He dedicated much of his career to the belief that freer trade can help address some of the most intractable challenges facing impoverished people around the globe.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I am happy to join my friend and Finance Committee colleague in expressing our gratitude to Ambassador Moore. Here in Washington, he witnessed the passage of three trade agreements, as well as historic trade legislation earlier this year that reflects many of the values he fought to instill in global trade policy. Ambassador Moore was always there with advice and good counsel as we navigated difficult waters, and his irrepressible spirit and good humor will be sorely missed.

Mr. WYDEN. As they say in New Zealand, ''He tangeta, he tangeta, he tangeta,'' which translated from the Maori language roughly means, ''people are the most important thing.''

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

CONGRATULATING THE WILDY FAMILY

• Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, today I wish to congratulate the Wildy family for being named the 2015 Arkansas Farm Family of the Year.

This honor recognizes the dedication of Wildy Family Farms and David and Patty Wildy to Arkansas's No. 1 industry.

The Wildy family settled in Mississippi County in 1914 and has been on

the same farm since 1938. David has devoted his life to farming, spending his childhood on the farm, and his passion has been passed down to his children. Wildy Family Farms is a fifth-generation farm. His father and grandfather both earned the Arkansas Master Farm Family award. Being named the Arkansas Farm Family of the Year has been a longtime dream for David.

David and Patty oversee 9,200 acres of land where they grow soybeans, cotton, wheat, milo, and peanuts. The Wildys are committed to being good stewards of the environment. Energy and water conservation play a major role in the business. Using a private environmental audit process to protect the condition of the land, Wildy Family Farms is able to meet and improve its conservation goals and the standards established for environmentally responsible practices.

David is a leader in Arkansas agriculture. He served as a member of the Mississippi County Farm Bureau board of directors for 7 years, presiding as president in 1986. In addition, he served on the Arkansas Agriculture Department board from 2005–2010 and is a member of the St. Francis Levee District board of directors, the University of Arkansas Agriculture Development Council, and several other boards and associations.

The Arkansas Farm Bureau's Farm Family of the Year program honors farm families across the State for their outstanding work both on their farms and in their communities. This recognition is a reflection of the contribution to agriculture at the community and State level and its implications for improved farm practices and management. The Wildy family is well deserving of this honor.

I congratulate David and Patty as well as other partners, which includes their sons and daughters Justin and Kristi Wildy, Tab and Taylor Wildy, Hayley Wildy and Paul and Bethany Harris, on their outstanding achievements in agriculture and ask my fellow colleagues to join me in honoring them for this accomplishment. I wish them continued success in the Farmer of the Year program and look forward to the contributions they will continue to offer Arkansas agriculture.●

TRIBUTE TO JEFF SAYER

● Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, my colleague Senator JIM RISCH joins me today in expressing our gratitude to Jeff Sayer, a great Idahoan and public servant. We honor Jeff's contributions over the past few years as he transitions from State service.

Jeff Sayer has served honorably as the State of Idaho director of the Department of Commerce since October 2011. During his 4 years of service at the Department of Commerce, Jeff accomplished many important objectives. They include the reorganization of the department, making it leaner and more responsive to business. Jeff likes to say that he wants a department that ''moves at the speed of business,'' and he was successful in meeting that goal. Jeff launched the Idaho Global Entrepreneurial Mission and established the Idaho Opportunity Fund, as well as Idaho's Tax Reimbursement Incentive that resulted in 4,047 new jobs, $496 million in new capital investments, $1.65 billion in total wages, and $288 million in new State revenue. These are just some of the impressive accomplishments of the Department of Commerce under the direction of Jeff Sayer.

Jeff's leadership of the Governor's Leadership in Nuclear Energy, or LINE, Commission is equally important. Jeff started this commission, led it through a complete review of the State's role in supporting nuclear energy and Idaho National Laboratory, and oversaw the completion of a final report that is still helping guide policymakers in Idaho and Washington, DC.

While we congratulate Jeff on being presented with an outstanding opportunity to return to the private sector, we are saddened to be losing his leadership and talents in State government. We wish Jeff and his wife, Laurel, well in their new endeavor and look forward to still leaning on Jeff for guidance and wisdom on a frequent basis.●

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message from the President of the United States was communicated to the Senate by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGE REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate a message from the President of the United States submitting a nomination which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary.

(The message received today is printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 11:06 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Novotny, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following joint resolutions, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.J. Res. 76. Joint resolution appointing the day for the convening of the second session of the One Hundred Fourteenth Congress.

H.J. Res. 78. Joint resolution making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2016, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the House has agreed to the following concurrent resolution, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H. Con. Res. 102. Concurrent resolution providing for a joint session of Congress to receive a message from the President.

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

At 2:09 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Novotny, one of its reading clerks, announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bill:

H.R. 2270. An act to redesignate the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, located in the State of Washington, as the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, to establish the Medicine Creek Treaty National Memorial within the wildlife refuge, and for other purposes.

The enrolled bill was subsequently signed by the Acting President pro tempore (Mr. MCCONNELL).

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

At 6:37 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bill:

H.J. Res. 78. Joint resolution making further continuing appropriations for fiscal year 2016, and for other purposes.

The enrolled joint resolution was subsequently signed by the Acting President pro tempore (Mr. MCCONNELL).

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:

By Ms. MURKOWSKI, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, with an amendment:

S. 329. A bill to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate certain segments of the Farmington River and Salmon Brook in the State of Connecticut as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 114–182).

By Ms. MURKOWSKI, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute and an amendment to the title:

S. 556. A bill to protect and enhance opportunities for recreational hunting, fishing, and shooting, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 114–183).

By Ms. MURKOWSKI, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, without amendment:

S. 782. A bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to establish a bison management plan for Grand Canyon National Park (Rept. No. 114–184).

By Ms. MURKOWSKI, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute:

S. 1583. A bill to authorize the expansion of an existing hydroelectric project (Rept. No. 114–185).

By Ms. MURKOWSKI, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, without amendment:

S. 1592. A bill to clarify the description of certain Federal land under the Northern Arizona Land Exchange and Verde River Basin Partnership Act of 2005 to include additional land in the Kaibab National Forest (Rept. No. 114–186).

By Ms. MURKOWSKI, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute:

S. 1694. A bill to amend Public Law 103–434 to authorize Phase III of the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project for the purposes of improving water management in the Yakima River basin, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 114–187).

By Ms. MURKOWSKI, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, without amendment:

S. 1941. A bill to authorize, direct, expedite, and facilitate a land exchange in El Paso and Teller Counties, Colorado, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 114–188).

S. 1942. A bill to require a land conveyance involving the Elkhorn Ranch and the White River National Forest in the State of Colorado, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 114–189).

S. 2046. A bill to authorize the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to issue an order continuing a stay of a hydroelectric license for the Mahoney Lake hydroelectric project in the State of Alaska, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 114–190).

By Ms. MURKOWSKI, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, with amendments:

S. 2069. A bill to amend the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 to modify provisions relating to certain land exchanges in the Mt. Hood Wilderness in the State of Oregon (Rept. No. 114–191).

By Ms. MURKOWSKI, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, without amendment:

S. 2083. A bill to extend the deadline for commencement of construction of a hydroelectric project (Rept. No. 114–192).

H.R. 373. A bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of Agriculture to expedite access to certain Federal land under the administrative jurisdiction of each Secretary for good Samaritan search-and-recovery missions, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 114–193).

H.R. 1324. A bill to adjust the boundary of the Arapaho National Forest, Colorado, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 114–194).

H.R. 1554. A bill to require a land conveyance involving the Elkhorn Ranch and the White River National Forest in the State of Colorado, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 114–195).

H.R. 2223. A bill to authorize, direct, expedite, and facilitate a land exchange in El Paso and Teller Counties, Colorado, and for other purposes (Rept. No. 114–196).

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. MCCAIN (for himself and Mr. FLAKE):

S. 2406. A bill to require the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration to review certain decisions to grant categorical exclusions for Next Generation flight procedures and to consult with the airports at which such procedures will be implemented; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Mr. MARKEY (for himself, Ms. AYOTTE, Ms. WARREN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mrs. BOXER, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. MERKLEY, and Mr. RUBIO):

S. 2407. A bill to posthumously award the Congressional Gold Medal to each of J. Christopher Stevens, Glen Doherty, Tyrone Woods, and Sean Smith in recognition of their contributions to the Nation; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

By Mr. FRANKEN:

S. 2408. A bill to direct the Secretary of Labor to issue an occupational safety and health standard to reduce injuries to patients, nurses, and all other health care workers by establishing a safe patient handling, mobility, and injury prevention standard, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. WYDEN:

S. 2409. A bill to amend titles XVIII and XIX of the Social Security Act to improve payments for hospital outpatient department services and complex rehabilitation technology and to improve program integrity, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 812

At the request of Mr. MORAN, the name of the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON) was added as a cosponsor of S. 812, a bill to enhance the ability of community financial institutions to foster economic growth and serve their communities, boost small businesses, increase individual savings, and for other purposes.

S. 901

At the request of Mr. MORAN, the name of the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 901, a bill to establish in the Department of Veterans Affairs a national center for research on the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions of the descendants of veterans exposed to toxic substances during service in the Armed Forces that are related to that exposure, to establish an advisory board on such health conditions, and for other purposes.

S. 1579

At the request of Mr. SCHATZ, the name of the Senator from Michigan (Mr. PETERS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1579, a bill to enhance and integrate Native American tourism, empower Native American communities, increase coordination and collaboration between Federal tourism assets, and expand heritage and cultural tourism opportunities in the United States.

S. 1587

At the request of Mr. KAINE, the name of the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1587, a bill to authorize the use of the United States Armed Forces against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

S. 1631

At the request of Mr. SANDERS, the name of the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1631, a bill to amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 and the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to modify certain provisions relating to multiemployer pensions, and for other purposes.

S. 1900

At the request of Mr. KAINE, the name of the Senator from Ohio (Mr. PORTMAN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 1900, a bill to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to allow the Secretary of Education to award job training Federal Pell Grants.

S. 1926

At the request of Ms. MIKULSKI, the names of the Senator from Colorado (Mr. GARDNER) and the Senator from Maine (Mr. KING) were added as cosponsors of S. 1926, a bill to ensure access to screening mammography services.

S. 2070

At the request of Ms. AYOTTE, the names of the Senator from Ohio (Mr. PORTMAN) and the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO) were added as cosponsors of S. 2070, a bill to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide more effective remedies to victims of discrimination in the payment of wages on the basis of sex, and for other purposes.

S. 2312

At the request of Mr. THUNE, the names of the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. HOEVEN), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), the Senator from Wyoming (Mr. BARRASSO), the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN) and the Senator from Wyoming (Mr. ENZI) were added as cosponsors of S. 2312, a bill to amend titles XVIII and XIX of the Social Security Act to make improvements to payments for durable medical equipment under the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

S. 2336

At the request of Mr. COONS, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. CASEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2336, a bill to modernize laws, and eliminate discrimination, with respect to people living with HIV/AIDS, and for other purposes.

S. 2373

At the request of Ms. CANTWELL, the name of the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 2373, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for Medicare coverage of certain lymphedema compression treatment items as items of durable medical equipment.

S. CON. RES. 26

At the request of Mr. KIRK, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. Con. Res. 26, a concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress regarding the right of States and local governments to maintain economic sanctions against Iran.

S. RES. 113

At the request of Mr. WARNER, the name of the Senator from Alaska (Mr. SULLIVAN) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 113, a resolution expressing the sense of the Senate that the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee should recommend the issuance of, and the United States Postal Service should issue, a commemorative stamp in honor of the holiday of Diwali.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. MARKEY (for himself, Ms. AYOTTE, Ms. WARREN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mrs. BOXER, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. MERKLEY, and Mr. RUBIO):

S. 2407. A bill to posthumously award the Congressional Gold Medal to each

of J. Christopher Stevens, Glen Doherty, Tyrone Woods, and Sean Smith in recognition of their contributions to the Nation; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, on September 11, 2012, militants attacked the Temporary Mission Facility of the United States, and its personnel, in Benghazi, Libya. As the attack unfolded, our people attempted to defend the Mission and protect United States diplomatic personnel. Tragically, they did not succeed and four brave Americans sacrificed their lives.

Today, along with Senators AYOTTE, WARREN, FEINSTEIN, BOXER, WYDEN, and MERKLEY, I am introducing legislation to honor Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, Glen Doherty, Tyrone Woods, and Sean Smith by posthumously awarding them the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of their selfless service and extraordinary contributions to the nation, at the cost of their lives. These distinguished public servants and warriors made the ultimate sacrifice for our Nation, and their memories will live on as an inspiration to all for their bravery and commitment to our Nation.

J. Christopher Stevens was serving as United States Ambassador to Libya and previously served twice in the country, as both Special Representative to the Libyan Transitional National Council and as the Deputy Chief of Mission. He served in the United States Foreign Service for twenty-one years. Public service was his life work. He started his career serving as a Peace Corps volunteer teaching English in Morocco.

Glen A. Doherty grew up in Winchester, MA. He was a Navy SEAL for twelve years. He served in Iraq and Afghanistan, attaining the rank of Petty Officer First Class and earned the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation medal.

Tyrone Woods was a Navy Seal for 20 years. He also served in both Iraq and Afghanistan, attaining the rank of Senior Chief Petty Officer when he retired. In Iraq, he led multiple raids and reconnaissance missions and earned the Bronze Star.

Both Glen Doherty and Tyrone Woods were working to protect American personnel abroad when the Temporary Mission Facility of the United States in Benghazi, Libya, was attacked. As the coordinated attack unfolded, Glen and Tyrone exposed themselves to enemy fire as they engaged attackers armed with guns, mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades. Their ultimate sacrifice saved the lives of American personnel who were rescued and safely returned to their families.

Sean Smith served in the Air Force for 6 years, attained the rank of Staff Sergeant and was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal. After leaving the Air Force, he served in the State Department for 10 years on various assignments which took him to places such as Baghdad, Brussels, Pretoria, the Hague, and Tripoli.

As their careers attest, all four men served our Nation honorably and with high distinction and utmost bravery. They made the supreme sacrifice for our country, and this medal represents the deep gratitude of a nation that will never forget their heroic service.

I ask all Senators to join me in support of this legislation to posthumously award these four brave American heroes the Congressional Gold Medal for giving our Nation their last full measure of devotion.

AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED AND PROPOSED

SA 2929. Mr. ALEXANDER (for himself, Ms. AYOTTE, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. JOHNSON, Mr. CASEY, Mr. COCHRAN, and Mr. BOOZMAN) proposed an amendment to the bill H.R. 3594, to extend temporarily the Federal Perkins Loan program, and for other purposes.

SA 2930. Mr. MCCONNELL (for Mr. CARPER (for himself, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mrs. MCCASKILL, and Mr. JOHNSON)) proposed an amendment to the bill S. 1616, to provide for the identification and prevention of improper payments and the identification of strategic sourcing opportunities by reviewing and analyzing the use of Federal agency charge cards.

SA 2931. Mr. MCCONNELL (for Mr. LANKFORD) proposed an amendment to the resolution S. Res. 310, condemning the ongoing sexual violence against women and children from Yezidi, Christian, Shabak, Turkmen, and other religious communities by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants and urging the prosecution of the perpetrators and those complicit in these crimes.

TEXT OF AMENDMENTS

SA 2929. Mr. ALEXANDER (for himself, Ms. AYOTTE, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. JOHNSON, Mr. CASEY, Mr. COCHRAN, and Mr. BOOZMAN) proposed an amendment to the bill H.R. 3594, to extend temporarily the Federal Perkins Loan program, and for other purposes; as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Federal Perkins Loan Program Extension Act of 2015''.

SEC. 2. EXTENSION OF FEDERAL PERKINS LOAN PROGRAM.

(a) AUTHORITY TO MAKE LOANS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Section 461 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087aa) is amended—

(A) in subsection (a), by striking ''of stimulating and assisting in the establishment and maintenance of funds at institutions of higher education for the making of low-interest loans to students in need thereof'' and inserting ''assisting in the maintenance of funds at institutions of higher education for the making of loans to undergraduate students in need'';

(B) by striking subsection (b) and inserting the following:

''(b) AUTHORITY TO MAKE LOANS.—

''(1) IN GENERAL.—

''(A) LOANS FOR NEW UNDERGRADUATE FEDERAL PERKINS LOAN BORROWERS.—Through September 30, 2017, an institution of higher education may make a loan under this part to an eligible undergraduate student who, on the date of disbursement of a loan made under this part, has no outstanding balance of principal or interest on a loan made under this part from the student loan fund established under this part by the institution, but only if the institution has awarded all Federal Direct Loans, as referenced under subparagraphs (A) and (D) of section 455(a)(2), for which such undergraduate student is eligible.

''(B) LOANS FOR CURRENT UNDERGRADUATE FEDERAL PERKINS LOAN BORROWERS.—Through September 30, 2017, an institution of higher education may make a loan under this part to an eligible undergraduate student who, on the date of disbursement of a loan made under this part, has an outstanding balance of principal or interest on a loan made under this part from the student loan fund established under this part by the institution, but only if the institution has awarded all Federal Direct Stafford Loans as referenced under section 455(a)(2)(A) for which such undergraduate student is eligible.

''(C) LOANS FOR CERTAIN GRADUATE BORROWERS.—Through September 30, 2016, with respect to an eligible graduate student who has received a loan made under this part prior to October 1, 2015, an institution of higher education that has most recently made such a loan to the student for an academic program at such institution may continue making loans under this part from the student loan fund established under this part by the institution to enable the student to continue or complete such academic program.

''(2) NO ADDITIONAL LOANS.—An institution of higher education shall not make loans under this part after September 30, 2017.

''(3) PROHIBITION ON ADDITIONAL APPROPRIATIONS.—No funds are authorized to be appropriated under this Act or any other Act to carry out the functions described in paragraph (1) for any fiscal year following fiscal year 2015.''; and

(C) by striking subsection (c).

(2) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Notwithstanding the amendments made under paragraph (1) of this subsection, an eligible graduate borrower who received a disbursement of a loan under part E of title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087aa et seq.) after June 30, 2016 and before October 1, 2016, for the 2016–2017 award year, may receive a subsequent disbursement of such loan by June 30, 2017, for which the borrower received an initial disbursement after June 30, 2016 and before October 1, 2016.

(b) DISTRIBUTION OF ASSETS FROM STUDENT LOAN FUNDS.—Section 466 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087ff) is amended—

(1) in subsection (a)—

(A) in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by striking ''After September 30, 2003, and not later than March 31, 2004'' and inserting ''Beginning October 1, 2017''; and

(B) in paragraph (1), by striking ''September 30, 2003'' and inserting ''September 30, 2017'';

(2) in subsection (b)—

(A) by striking ''After October 1, 2012'' and inserting ''Beginning October 1, 2017''; and

(B) by striking ''September 30, 2003'' and inserting ''September 30, 2017''; and

(3) in subsection (c)(1), by striking ''October 1, 2004'' and inserting ''October 1, 2017''.

(c) ADDITIONAL EXTENSIONS NOT PERMITTED.—Section 422 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1226a) shall not apply to further extend the duration of the authority under paragraph (1) of section 461(b) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087aa(b)), as amended by subsection (a)(1) of this section, beyond September 30, 2017, on the basis of the extension under such subsection.

SEC. 3. DISCLOSURE REQUIRED PRIOR TO DISBURSEMENT.

Section 463A(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1087cc–1(a)) is amended—

(1) in paragraph (12), by striking ''and'' after the semicolon;

(2) in paragraph (13), by striking the period at the end and inserting a semicolon; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

''(14) a notice and explanation regarding the end to future availability of loans made under this part;

''(15) a notice and explanation that repayment and forgiveness benefits available to borrowers of loans made under part D are not available to borrowers participating in the loan program under this part;

''(16) a notice and explanation regarding a borrower's option to consolidate a loan made under this part into a Federal Direct Loan under part D, including any benefit of such consolidation;

''(17) with respect to new undergraduate Federal Perkins loan borrowers, as described in section 461(b)(1)(A), a notice and explanation providing a comparison of the interest rates of loans under this part and part D and informing the borrower that the borrower has reached the maximum annual borrowing limit for which the borrower is eligible as referenced under subparagraphs (A) and (D) of section 455(a)(2); and

''(18) with respect to current undergraduate Federal Perkins loan borrowers, as described in section 461(b)(1)(B), a notice and explanation providing a comparison of the interest rates of loans under this part and part D and informing the borrower that the borrower has reached the maximum annual borrowing limit for which the borrower is eligible on Federal Direct Stafford Loans as referenced under section 455(a)(2)(A).''.

SA 2930. Mr. MCCONNELL (for Mr. CARPER (for himself, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mrs. MCCASKILL, and Mr. JOHNSON)) proposed an amendment to the bill S. 1616, to provide for the identification and prevention of improper payments and the identification of strategic sourcing opportunities by reviewing and analyzing the use of Federal agency charge cards; as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Saving Federal Dollars Through Better Use of Government Purchase and Travel Cards Act of 2015''.

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) IMPROPER PAYMENT.—The term ''improper payment'' has the meaning given the term in section 2 of the Improper Payments Information Act of 2002 (31 U.S.C. 3321 note).

(2) QUESTIONABLE TRANSACTION.—The term ''questionable transaction'' means a charge card transaction that from initial card data appears to be high risk and may therefore be improper due to non-compliance with applicable law, regulation or policy.

(3) STRATEGIC SOURCING.—The term ''strategic sourcing'' means analyzing and modifying a Federal agency's spending patterns to better leverage its purchasing power, reduce costs, and improve overall performance.

SEC. 3. EXPANDED USE OF DATA ANALYTICS.

(a) STRATEGY.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in consultation with the Administrator for General Services, shall develop a strategy to expand the use of data analytics in managing government purchase and travel charge card programs. These analytics may employ existing General Services Administration capabilities, and may be in conjunction with agencies' capabilities, for the purpose of —

(1) identifying examples or patterns of questionable transactions and developing enhanced tools and methods for agency use in—

(A) identifying questionable purchase and travel card transactions; and

(B) recovering improper payments made with purchase and travel cards;

(2) identifying potential opportunities for agencies to further leverage administrative process streamlining and cost reduction from purchase and travel card use, including additional agency opportunities for card-based strategic sourcing;

(3) developing a set of purchase and travel card metrics and benchmarks for high risk activities, which shall assist agencies in identifying potential emphasis areas for their purchase and travel card management and oversight activities, including those required by the Government Charge Card Abuse Prevention Act of 2012 (Public Law 112–194); and

(4) developing a plan, which may be based on existing capabilities, to create a library of analytics tools and data sources for use by Federal agencies (including inspectors general of those agencies).

SEC. 4. GUIDANCE ON IMPROVING INFORMATION SHARING TO CURB IMPROPER PAYMENTS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in consultation with the Administrator of General Services and the interagency charge card data management group established under section 5, shall issue guidance on improving information sharing by government agencies (including inspectors general) for the purposes of section 3(a)(1).

(b) ELEMENTS.—The guidance issued under subsection (a) shall—

(1) require relevant officials at Federal agencies to identify high-risk activities and communicate that information to the appropriate management levels within the agencies;

(2) require that appropriate officials at Federal agencies review the reports issued by charge card-issuing banks on questionable transaction activity (such as purchase and travel card pre-suspension and suspension reports, delinquency reports, and exception reports), including transactions that occur with high risk activities, and suspicious timing or amounts of cash withdrawals or advances;

(3) provide for the appropriate sharing of information related to potential questionable transactions, fraud schemes, and high risk activities with General Services Administration Office of Charge Card Management and the appropriate officials in Federal agencies; and

(4) include other requirements determined appropriate by the Director for the purposes of carrying out this Act.

SEC. 5. INTERAGENCY CHARGE CARD DATA MANAGEMENT GROUP.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Administrator of General Services and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall establish a purchase and travel charge card data management group to develop and share best practices for the purposes described in section 3(a).

(b) ELEMENTS.—The best practices developed under subsection (a) shall—

(1) cover rules, edits, and task order or contract modifications related to charge card-issuing banks;

(2) include the review of accounts payable information and purchase and travel card transaction data of agencies for the purpose of identifying potential strategic sourcing and other additional opportunities (such as recurring payments, utility payments, and grant payments) for which the charge cards or related payment products could be used as a payment method; and

(3) include other best practices as determined by the Administrator and Director.

(c) MEMBERSHIP.—The purchase and travel charge card data management group shall meet regularly as determined by the co-chairs, for a duration of three years, and include those agencies as described in section 2 of the Government Charge Card Abuse Prevention Act of 2012 (Public Law 112–194) and others identified by the Administrator and Director.

SEC. 6. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.

(a) GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator for General Services shall submit a report to Congress on the implementation of this Act, including the metrics used in determining whether the analytic and benchmarking efforts have reduced, or contributed to the reduction of, questionable or improper payments as well as improved utilization of card-based payment products.

(b) AGENCY REPORTS AND CONSOLIDATED REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the head of each Federal agency described in section 2 of the Government Charge Card Abuse Prevention Act of 2012 (Public Law 112–194) shall submit a report to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget on that agency's activities to implement this Act.

(c) OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET REPORT TO CONGRESS.—The Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall submit to Congress a consolidated report of agency activities to implement this Act, which may be included as part of another report submitted to Congress by the Director.

(d) REPORT ON ADDITIONAL SAVINGS OPPORTUNITIES.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator of General Services shall submit a report to Congress identifying and exploring further potential savings opportunities for government agencies under the Federal charge card programs. This report may be combined with the report required under subsection (a).

SA 2931. Mr. MCCONNELL (for Mr. LANKFORD) proposed an amendment to the resolution S. Res. 310, condemning the ongoing sexual violence against women and children from Yezidi, Christian, Shabak, Turkmen, and other religious communities by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants and urging the prosecution of the perpetrators and those complicit in these crimes; as follows:

On page 3, line 4, insert ''by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants'' before the semicolon at the end.

On page 3, line 10, strike ''and''.

On page 4, line 2, strike the period at the end and inserting ''; and''.

On page 4, after line 2, add the following:

(4) defines ''complicit'', for purposes of this resolution, as having knowingly and willingly taken actions which have directly supported, promoted, enabled, aided, abetted, or encouraged crimes involving sexual violence against women and children from Yezidi, Christian, Shabak, Turkmen, or other religious communities by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants, including actively working to deny, cover up, or alter evidence of such crimes.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on December 16, 2015, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a hearing entitled ''The Administration's Strategy in Afghanistan.''

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

PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Joshua Manning, a NASA fellow and a detailee, and Brandon Fisher, a Coast Guard fellow at the commerce committee, be allowed floor privileges for the 114th Congress.

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

MEASURE INDEFINITELY POSTPONED—H. CON. RES. 91

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that H. Con. Res. 91 be indefinitely postponed.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations en bloc: Calendar Nos. 269, 433, 435, 436, and 437.

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

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Thomas O. Melia, of Maryland, to be an Assistant Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development; Gabriel Camarillo, of Texas, to be an Assistant Secretary of the Air Force; Marcel John Lettre, II, of Maryland, to be Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence; the Navy, Vice Adm. Kurt W. Tidd to be Admiral; and Thomas Edgar Rothman, of Maryland, to be a Member of the National Council on the Arts for a term expiring September 3, 2016.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote en bloc without intervening action or debate on the nominations in the order listed; that following disposition of the nominations, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that any statements related to the nominations be printed in the RECORD; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Melia, Camarillo, Lettre, Tidd, and Rothman nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination under the privileged section of the Executive Calendar: PN892; that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nomination; that any related statements be printed in the RECORD; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session.

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

The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Steven Michael Haro, of Virginia, to be an Assistant Secretary of Commerce.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Haro nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now resume legislative session.

SECURING FAIRNESS IN REGULATORY TIMING ACT OF 2015

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 3831, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3831) to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to extend the annual comment period for payment rates under Medicare Advantage.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The bill (H.R. 3831) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

SAVING FEDERAL DOLLARS THROUGH BETTER USE OF GOVERNMENT PURCHASE AND TRAVEL CARDS ACT OF 2015

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 315, S. 1616.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1616) to provide for the identification and prevention of improper payments and the identification of strategic sourcing opportunities by reviewing and analyzing the use of Federal agency charge cards.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I further ask unanimous consent that the Carper substitute amendment which is at the desk be agreed to; the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed; and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The amendment (No. 2930) in the nature of a substitute was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute)

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Saving Federal Dollars Through Better Use of Government Purchase and Travel Cards Act of 2015''.

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) IMPROPER PAYMENT.—The term ''improper payment'' has the meaning given the term in section 2 of the Improper Payments Information Act of 2002 (31 U.S.C. 3321 note).

(2) QUESTIONABLE TRANSACTION.—The term ''questionable transaction'' means a charge card transaction that from initial card data appears to be high risk and may therefore be improper due to non-compliance with applicable law, regulation or policy.

(3) STRATEGIC SOURCING.—The term ''strategic sourcing'' means analyzing and modifying a Federal agency's spending patterns to better leverage its purchasing power, reduce costs, and improve overall performance.

SEC. 3. EXPANDED USE OF DATA ANALYTICS.

(a) STRATEGY.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in consultation with the Administrator for General Services, shall develop a strategy to expand the use of data analytics in managing government purchase and travel charge card programs. These analytics may employ existing General Services Administration capabilities, and may be in conjunction with agencies' capabilities, for the purpose of —

(1) identifying examples or patterns of questionable transactions and developing enhanced tools and methods for agency use in—

(A) identifying questionable purchase and travel card transactions; and

(B) recovering improper payments made with purchase and travel cards;

(2) identifying potential opportunities for agencies to further leverage administrative process streamlining and cost reduction from purchase and travel card use, including additional agency opportunities for card-based strategic sourcing;

(3) developing a set of purchase and travel card metrics and benchmarks for high risk activities, which shall assist agencies in identifying potential emphasis areas for their purchase and travel card management and oversight activities, including those required by the Government Charge Card Abuse Prevention Act of 2012 (Public Law 112–194); and

(4) developing a plan, which may be based on existing capabilities, to create a library of analytics tools and data sources for use by Federal agencies (including inspectors general of those agencies).

SEC. 4. GUIDANCE ON IMPROVING INFORMATION SHARING TO CURB IMPROPER PAYMENTS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, in consultation with the Administrator of General Services and the interagency charge card data management group established under section 5, shall issue guidance on improving information sharing by government agencies (including inspectors general) for the purposes of section 3(a)(1).

(b) ELEMENTS.—The guidance issued under subsection (a) shall—

(1) require relevant officials at Federal agencies to identify high-risk activities and communicate that information to the appropriate management levels within the agencies;

(2) require that appropriate officials at Federal agencies review the reports issued by charge card-issuing banks on questionable transaction activity (such as purchase and travel card pre-suspension and suspension reports, delinquency reports, and exception reports), including transactions that occur with high risk activities, and suspicious timing or amounts of cash withdrawals or advances;

(3) provide for the appropriate sharing of information related to potential questionable transactions, fraud schemes, and high risk activities with General Services Administration Office of Charge Card Management and the appropriate officials in Federal agencies; and

(4) include other requirements determined appropriate by the Director for the purposes of carrying out this Act.

SEC. 5. INTERAGENCY CHARGE CARD DATA MANAGEMENT GROUP.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Administrator of General Services and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall establish a purchase and travel charge card data management group to develop and share best practices for the purposes described in section 3(a).

(b) ELEMENTS.—The best practices developed under subsection (a) shall—

(1) cover rules, edits, and task order or contract modifications related to charge card-issuing banks;

(2) include the review of accounts payable information and purchase and travel card transaction data of agencies for the purpose of identifying potential strategic sourcing and other additional opportunities (such as recurring payments, utility payments, and grant payments) for which the charge cards or related payment products could be used as a payment method; and

(3) include other best practices as determined by the Administrator and Director.

(c) MEMBERSHIP.—The purchase and travel charge card data management group shall meet regularly as determined by the co-chairs, for a duration of three years, and include those agencies as described in section 2 of the Government Charge Card Abuse Prevention Act of 2012 (Public Law 112–194) and others identified by the Administrator and Director.

SEC. 6. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.

(a) GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator for General Services shall submit a report to Congress on the implementation of this Act, including the metrics used in determining whether the analytic and benchmarking efforts have reduced, or contributed to the reduction of, questionable or improper payments as well as improved utilization of card-based payment products.

(b) AGENCY REPORTS AND CONSOLIDATED REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the head of each Federal agency described in section 2 of the Government Charge Card Abuse Prevention Act of 2012 (Public Law 112–194) shall submit a report to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget on that agency's activities to implement this Act.

(c) OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET REPORT TO CONGRESS.—The Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall submit to Congress a consolidated report of agency activities to implement this Act, which may be included as part of another report submitted to Congress by the Director.

(d) REPORT ON ADDITIONAL SAVINGS OPPORTUNITIES.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator of General Services shall submit a report to Congress identifying and exploring further potential savings opportunities for government agencies under the Federal charge card programs. This report may be combined with the report required under subsection (a).

The bill (S. 1616), as amended, was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

REGARDING THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF DEMOCRACY IN MONGOLIA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 320, S. Res. 189.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 189) expressing the sense of the Senate regarding the 25th anniversary of democracy in Mongolia.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 189) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in the RECORD of June 1, 2015, under ''Submitted Resolutions.'')

CONGRATULATING THE PEOPLE OF BURMA ON THEIR COMMITMENT TO PEACEFUL ELECTIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 321, S. Res. 320.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 320) congratulating the people of Burma on their commitment to peaceful elections.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution, which had been reported from the Committee on Foreign Relations, with an amendment to strike out all after the resolving clause and insert the part printed in italic.

S. RES. 320

Whereas Burma conducted general elections on November 8, 2015, the country's first national vote since a civilian government was introduced in 2011 that ended nearly 50 years of military rule;

Whereas the people of Burma have, by their vigorous participation in electoral campaigning and public debate, strengthened the foundations of a free and democratic way of life;

Whereas preliminary reports indicate that voter turnout exceeded 80 percent;

Whereas international observers have reported that election day was largely free and fair and conducted in an orderly and peaceful fashion despite broader structural concerns such as the disenfranchisement of the Rohingya;

Whereas the ruling military-backed Union Solidarity *and* Development Party suffered a dramatic loss at the polls, and the National League for Democracy won a sizable majority in both chambers of Burma's Union Parliament, the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, and will select Burma's next President;

Whereas Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has symbolized the struggle for freedom and democracy in Burma and has actively supported democratic reform through her leadership of the National League for Democracy;

Whereas the National League for Democracy espouses a policy of nonviolent movement towards multi-party democracy in Burma, supports national reconciliation, and endorses strengthening democratic institutions, protecting human rights, implementing free market economic reforms, and reinforcing rule of law;

Whereas President Thein Sein and Commander-in-Chief Min Aug Hlaing made public commitments to respect the election results and vowed to abide by the law to ensure an orderly and prompt transition to a new government; and

Whereas the continued democratic development of Burma is a matter of fundamental importance to the advancement of United States interests in Southeast Asia and is supported by the United States Senate: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) congratulates the people of Burma for embracing democracy through their participation in the November 8, 2015, general elections, and for their continuing efforts in developing a free, democratic society that respects internationally recognized human rights;

(2) recognizes the National League for Democracy's victory as a reflection of the will of the Burmese people;

(3) calls on the Union Solidarity and Development Party to undertake a peaceful transfer of power and abide by the law to ensure an orderly and prompt transition to a new government;

(4) encourages all parties to pursue national reconciliation talks and work together in the

spirit of national unity to seek what is best for the country;

(5) recognizes that while the Government of Burma has made important progress towards democratization, there remain serious challenges and impediments to the realization of full democratic and civilian government, including the reservation of unelected seats for the military and the disenfranchisement of groups of people including the Rohingya;

(6) expresses hope that newly elected members of parliament will contribute to the ongoing political transformation and will herald a new generation of responsible democratic leadership in Burma;

(7) calls on the Government of Burma to support meaningful efforts to reform the 2008 Constitution of Burma, with the full and unfettered participation of all the people of Burma and in a manner that promotes and protects democratic development of Burma and safeguards against arbitrary interference by the military;

(8) calls on the Government of Burma to release all political prisoners;

(9) supports negotiations between the Government of Burma and ethnic groups and organizations toward a genuine national ceasefire;

(10) encourages the President of the United States, in close and timely consultation with Congress, to continue to support efforts to promote genuine democratic transition and to ensure that any changes in United States policy toward Burma, including the consideration of any potential relaxation of restrictions, are aligned with support for a genuine and sustainable democratic transition; and

(11) reaffirms that the people of the United States will continue to stand with the people of Burma in support of democracy, partnership, and peace.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the committee-reported amendment be agreed to; that the resolution, as amended, be agreed to; that the preamble be agreed to; and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The committee-reported amendment in the nature of a substitute was agreed to.

The resolution (S. Res. 320), as amended, was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

CELEBRATING THE 135TH ANNIVERSARY OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND ROMANIA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 322, S. Res. 326.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 326) celebrating the 135th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the United States and Romania.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution, which had been reported from the Committee on Foreign Relations with an amendment to the preamble.

(Omit the part in boldface brackets and insert the part printed in italic.)

S. RES. 326

Whereas the United States established diplomatic relations with Romania in June 1880;

Whereas the Governments of the United States and Romania strive to continually improve cooperation between government leaders and strengthen the two countries' strategic partnership, focusing on the political-military relationship, law-enforcement collaboration, trade and investment opportunities, and energy security;

Whereas the Governments of the United States and Romania are committed to supporting human rights, advancing the rule of law, democratic governance, economic growth, and freedom;

Whereas Romania joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2004, and has established itself *both* as a resolute ally of **[**both**]** the United States and *as a* strong NATO member;

Whereas the Government of Romania continues to improve its military capabilities, and has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to provide forces and assets in support of operations that address the national security interests of the United States and all NATO members, including deployments to Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Kosovo;

Whereas, in 2011, the United States and Romania issued the ''Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century Between the United States of America and Romania,'' reflecting increasing cooperation between our countries to promote security, democracy, free market opportunities, and cultural exchange;

Whereas the United States and Romania signed a ballistic missile defense (BMD) agreement in 2011, allowing the deployment of United States personnel, equipment, and anti-missile interceptors to Romania;

Whereas, in October 2014, the United States Navy formally launched Naval Support Facility Deveselu to achieve the goals of the 2011 BMD agreement and thus established the first new United States Navy base since 1987;

Whereas, in September 2015, Romania stood up a NATO Force Integration Unit;

Whereas Romania will host the Alliance's Multinational Division-Southeast headquarters in Bucharest and commits significant resources to the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force;

Whereas Romania has agreed to host components of the United States European Phased Adaptive Approach missile defense system, which will be operational by the end of 2015; and

Whereas, for the past 25 years, the Government of Romania has shown leadership in advancing stability, security, and democratic principles in Central and Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, and the Black Sea region, especially in the current difficult regional context: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) celebrates the 135th anniversary of United States-Romanian diplomatic relations;

(2) congratulates the people of Romania on their accomplishments as a great nation; and

(3) expresses appreciation for Romania's unwavering partnership with the United States.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to; that the amendment to the preamble be agreed to; that the preamble, as amended, be agreed to; and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 326) was agreed to.

The amendment to the preamble was agreed to.

The preamble, as amended, was agreed to.

CONDEMNING THE ONGOING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM YEZIDI, CHRISTIAN, SHABAK, TURKMEN, AND OTHER RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES BY ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA MILITANTS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 297, S. Res. 310.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 310) condemning the ongoing sexual violence against women and children from Yezidi, Christian, Shabak, Turkmen, and other religious communities by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants and urging the prosecution of the perpetrators and those complicit in these crimes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am here to support the bipartisan efforts and goals of my colleagues in S. Res. 310, which condemns the ongoing sexual violence perpetrated by ISIL against women and children from Yezidi and other religious communities.

The horrific and despicable actions of ISIL against women and girls who were kidnapped, enslaved, tortured, raped, and impregnated in conflict-affected regions there and others around the world are one of the horrors of terrorism. This resolution addresses it, but it could and should have gone much further. In fact, it lacks the recognition of the full range of support that Yezidi survivors of sexual violence desperately need. That is the reason that I offered two amendments to improve this important resolution, to urge the President to exercise his existing authority. No new author is necessary for him to provide and support age-appropriate, comprehensive post-violence care, including the provision of treatment to prevent HIV infection, trauma and surgical care, mental health services, social and legal support, and a full range of medically necessary reproductive health services, including emergency contraception, safe abortion care, and maternal health services.

When the horrors that ISIL inflicts on the Yezidis came to light in the New York Times report entitled ''ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape,'' including systematic rape of women and children in ISIL-held territory, I demanded that our great Nation take action. I refer my colleagues' attention to that article.

We cannot allow for the continued use of rape as a tool of warfare to destabilize and disrupt communities, to

exert control over women and girls, and in the case of the Yezidis, to impregnate them purposefully and relentlessly. Survivors should not be forced to carry pregnancies to full term simply because access to reproductive health care is not available following their vicious assault.

We cannot stand idly by while witnessing such violations of human rights and dignity. The United States must work to increase access to reproductive health care for the vulnerable populations, particularly safe abortion services, and most especially for the Yezidi girls and women who were purposefully impregnated as a tool of terrorism by ISIL.

I have called on the administration multiple times to confront this horror. In September, I wrote a letter with five of my Democratic colleagues to Secretary Kerry, calling on the State Department to declare Iraqi religious minorities, including the Yezidis, as protected priority groups so they could seek refugee assistance within Iraq's border.

In October, I wrote a letter with 27 of my Democratic colleagues, calling on the President to take action to properly implement existing law. Existing law includes the Helms amendment. Tomorrow is the 42nd anniversary of the Helms amendment. For its entire existence, the Helms amendment has been incorrectly interpreted, and it continues to serve as a critical obstacle in our foreign aid efforts to provide for safe abortions in the case of rape, incest, and life endangerment.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the letter and the response of the administration dated December 7, 2015, be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,
Washington, DC, October 22, 2015.

President BARACK OBAMA,
The White House,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: We write to express our deep concern for the reproductive health of women and girls who are kidnapped, enslaved, tortured, raped, and impregnated in conflict-affected zones worldwide. Rape is increasingly used as a tool of warfare to destabilize communities, exert control over women and girls, and in some cases purposely impregnate them, as executed by Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Syria and Iraq. Survivors are forced to carry pregnancies to full term because access to reproductive healthcare is not available following their assault. We cannot be bystanders to such gross violations of the human dignity of these women and girls. If the U.S. does not work to increase access to reproductive healthcare for vulnerable populations, particularly safe abortion services, there will be negative, long-term consequences. As such, we implore you to take the following actions to confront this crisis.

We request you take action to correct the overly constrained implementation of the Helms Amendment which serves as a critical barrier to safe abortion, particularly impacting women and girls fleeing conflict. Although the Helms Amendment prevents U.S. foreign aid from being used to perform abortions for family planning purposes, for over 40 years it has been incorrectly interpreted to prevent the use of foreign aid to fund safe abortions even in the cases of rape, incest, or life endangerment. These three cases clearly fall outside the restrictions enacted by the Helms Amendment. As such, we urge you to issue guidance to the relevant agencies, allowing them to support safe abortion services in at least the limited circumstances of rape, incest, or life endangerment, including for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

Subsequently, we urge you to exercise your existing authority to ensure U.S. foreign aid does not stand in the way of women and girls fleeing conflict who seek abortion services. The Helms Amendment restricts U.S. foreign aid from being used to pay for abortion even in countries where abortion is permissible by local law. For instance, although abortion remains illegal in Syria and Iraq, regional countries which receive U.S. foreign assistance—Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt—have welcomed millions of refugees and have varying legal exceptions or allowances for abortions related to rape, incest, or life endangerment, which are undermined by limitations imposed by this policy.

Finally, we applaud commitments made by this Administration to address these issues, including those made last year at the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict and those in the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP). We request that you further strengthen actions taken under the NAP implementation plan. A high-level objective of the NAP is ensuring women's access to relief and recovery in a manner that recognizes the unique needs of women and girls in conflict-affected zones and the need to provide humanitarian services. As expressly noted in the NAP, women's access to relief and recovery can be addressed by ''support[ing] access to reproductive health in emergencies and humanitarian settings.'' As such, we encourage increased attention to this matter and request a report of the Administration's comprehensive review and update to the NAP, scheduled to be released this year. We also ask that the Administration provide an assessment of how the relevant agencies are fulfilling their respective duties to provide access to the full range of reproductive healthcare.

We look forward to working with you to ensure these actions are implemented. As the world's largest aid donor, the U.S. can and should endeavor to provide the reproductive healthcare that is desperately needed by some of the world's most vulnerable populations.

Sincerely,

Richard Blumenthal; Jeanne Shaheen; Kirsten E. Gillibrand; Barbara Boxer; Michael F. Bennet; Claire McCaskill; Mazie K. Hirono; Patty Murray; Edward J. Markey; Patrick J. Leahy; Al Franken; Sherrod Brown; Christopher A. Coons; Brian Schatz; Cory A. Booker; Elizabeth Warren; Maria Cantwell; Charles E. Schumer; Tammy Baldwin; Barbara A. Mikulski; Christopher Murphy; Richard J. Durbin; Ron Wyden; Bernard Sanders; Dianne Feinstein; Debbie Stabenow; Gary C. Peters; Amy Klobuchar.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, DC, December 7, 2015.

Hon. RICHARD BLUMENTHAL,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR BLUMENTHAL: Thank you for your letter of October 22 to President Obama regarding your concern about access to reproductive health care in conflict settings. We have been asked to respond on the President's behalf.

The Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development take this issue very seriously. The Helms Amendment has prohibited since 1973 the use of U.S. foreign assistance to pay for the performance of abortion as a method of family planning or to motivate or coerce any person to practice abortions. We review our policies on an ongoing basis to ensure maximum effectiveness in improving health outcomes, including for those who are highly vulnerable to sexual violence because of conflict or other crises.

Through our policies and investments, we continue to demonstrate our commitment to rights and protection of women and girls worldwide. We do so by working with the international community, including the UN Population Fund, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other development and humanitarian organizations. We work together to: respond to the challenges of increasing access to reproductive health services in crisis settings; strengthen global coordination to prevent sexual violence; promote justice and accountability; and provide health care, including sexual and reproductive health services.

The U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security outlines the United States' commitment to the protection and participation of women in a broad range of efforts to resolve conflict and sustain peace. The Department of State and other agencies are reviewing the NAP under the auspices of the National Security Council. This interagency review reflects our commitment to accountable implementation and rigorous learning of best practices. Upon completion of the review later this year, the Department would be pleased to brief you and your staff on relevant findings.

Your letter provides valuable input on these important issues. We welcome any additional input you or your staff may have, and look forward to continued dialogue.

Sincerely,

JULIA FRIFIELD,
Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. The letter very simply asks that the administration ''take action to correct the overly constrained implementation of the Helms amendment which serves as a critical barrier to safe abortion, particularly impacting women and girls fleeing conflict.'' The letter asks that the administration recognize that American foreign aid can be used to fund safe abortions even in the cases of rape, incest, or life endangerment. That is a very simple principle.

Preventing our foreign aid funds from being used for that purpose not only denies critical assistance to Yezidi girls and women, but also overly constrains the assistance of this great Nation to the victims of terror and horror abroad.

Today, the U.S. Senate will adopt S. Res. 310, and I have joined in supporting it. I am deeply disappointed that the administration has essentially denied even considering a change in policy. This action does not mean that the United States should be complacent regarding the dismal state of protection for the Yezidi girls and women.

The amendments I offered were rejected by my Republican colleagues,

and I understand my colleagues' goal of expressing concern for girls and women and others. Despite my reservation and profound disappointment with the administration's reaction to and the denial of these two amendments, I am supporting this resolution. I have withdrawn my amendments, recognizing the reality of our current situation on the floor of the U.S. Senate, but it remains essential that we recognize the full scope of the post-rape health care needed by survivors of rape. These victims have been hideously and gruesomely used as a tool of terrorism invoked by ISIL.

Fully countering ISIL's terrorist strategy means providing necessary and compassionate care for girls and women who have been victims and have been shunned by their families. They have been rejected by their communities. They have been victims many times over as a result of these heinous crimes committed against them.

I hope that my fellow Senators will join me as I continue to call on the administration to right this wrong. As the world's largest donor of assistance around the world, the United States can and should do better and do more to provide health care that girls and women vitally need when they become vulnerable and, in fact, victims of terror inflicted by these heinous criminal acts.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Lankford amendment to the resolution be agreed to; that the resolution, as amended, be agreed to; that the preamble be agreed to; and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The amendment (No. 2931) was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: To define ''complicit'' for purposes of the resolution)

On page 3, line 4, insert ''by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants'' before the semicolon at the end.

On page 3, line 10, strike ''and''.

On page 4, line 2, strike the period at the end and inserting ''; and''.

On page 4, after line 2, add the following:

(4) defines ''complicit'', for purposes of this resolution, as having knowingly and willingly taken actions which have directly supported, promoted, enabled, aided, abetted, or encouraged crimes involving sexual violence against women and children from Yezidi, Christian, Shabak, Turkmen, or other religious communities by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants, including actively working to deny, cover up, or alter evidence of such crimes.

The resolution (S. Res. 310), as amended, was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The resolution, as amended, with its preamble, reads as follows:

S. RES. 310

Whereas the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has publicly and systematically targeted communities on the basis of their religious identities, including Yezidis, Christians, Shi'a Muslims, Shabaks, Turkmens, and Kaka'i, in a campaign of violence that includes summary executions, beheadings, torture, arbitrary detainment, forced displacement, rape and sexual violence, and enslavement;

Whereas enslavement and sexual violence against women is a widespread practice among ISIS militants, who have, according to the Yezidi Affairs Directory, captured and enslaved as many as 5,500 Yezidis, including as many as 3,000 women, since August 2014;

Whereas ISIS has established a formal slave trade in which women and girls as young as 5 years old are systematically abducted, transported, categorized according to physical traits and perceived value, and traded among ISIS militants or sold for as little as $10;

Whereas the Research and Fatwa Department of ISIS has issued guidelines and directions for the enslavement of Yezidi women and children and has justified the actions on the basis of religious teachings;

Whereas the New York Times reported that ''the Islamic State has developed a detailed bureaucracy of sex slavery, including sales contracts notarized by the ISIS-run Islamic courts'';

Whereas according to various reports, including testimony before Congress by Khidher Domle, a Yezidi activist and Director of the Media Department at the University of Dohuk, the enslavement and sexual violence used against Yezidi women and children by ISIS militants in their attack on Mount Sinjar was premeditated;

Whereas ISIS has initiated the mass killing of Yezidi men and boys, the sexual violence and enslavement of Yezidi women and children, and the forced displacement of Christians and other religious communities;

Whereas the threat and reach of ISIS extends beyond Iraq and Syria into the rest of the world, as demonstrated by ISIS-affiliated attacks and recruitment of foreign fighters from the United States, Europe, Central Asia, and Africa;

Whereas, according to testimony presented before the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives on September 29, 2015, it is possible that one of the ISIS militants involved in the sexual slavery of Yezidi women and children is a United States citizen; and

Whereas the United States Government should investigate and urge prosecution of American citizens who are perpetrators of or complicit in such crimes: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) condemns the ongoing sexual violence against women and children from Yezidi, Christian, Shabak, Turkmen, and other religious communities by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants;

(2) calls on the Attorney General to commence the investigation and prosecution of any United States citizens alleged to be perpetrators of or complicit in these crimes and to report back to Congress what steps are being taken to investigate and urge the prosecution of those involved;

(3) calls on the Government of Iraq and the governments of other countries to identify individual perpetrators and individuals involved in these crimes and take appropriate measures to arrest and urge the prosecution of those individuals; and

(4) defines ''complicit'', for purposes of this resolution, as having knowingly and willingly taken actions which have directly supported, promoted, enabled, aided, abetted, or encouraged crimes involving sexual violence against women and children from Yezidi, Christian, Shabak, Turkmen, or other religious communities by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants, including actively working to deny, cover up, or alter evidence of such crimes.

ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2015

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 10 a.m., Thursday, December 17; that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, and the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day; further, that following leader remarks, the Senate be in a period of morning business until 6 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M. TOMORROW

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 6:52 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, December 17, 2015, at 10 a.m.

NOMINATIONS

Executive nominations received by the Senate:

THE JUDICIARY

PAUL LEWIS ABRAMS, OF CALIFORNIA, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA, VICE DEAN D. PREGERSON, RETIRED.

SUZANNE MITCHELL, OF OKLAHOMA, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF OKLAHOMA, VICE DAVID L. RUSSELL, RETIRED.

SCOTT L. PALK, OF OKLAHOMA, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF OKLAHOMA, VICE STEPHEN P. FRIOT, RETIRED.

RONALD G. RUSSELL, OF UTAH, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF UTAH, VICE BRIAN THEADORE STEWART, RETIRED.

CONFIRMATIONS

Executive nominations confirmed by the Senate December 16, 2015:

UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

THOMAS O. MELIA, OF MARYLAND, TO BE AN ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR OF THE UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

GABRIEL CAMARILLO, OF TEXAS, TO BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE.

MARCEL JOHN LETTRE, II, OF MARYLAND, TO BE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTELLIGENCE.

IN THE NAVY

THE FOLLOWING NAMED OFFICER FOR APPOINTMENT IN THE UNITED STATES NAVY TO THE GRADE INDICATED WHILE ASSIGNED TO A POSITION OF IMPORTANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY UNDER TITLE 10, U.S.C., SECTION 601:

To be admiral

VICE ADM. KURT W. TIDD

NATIONAL FOUNDATION ON THE ARTS AND THE HUMANITIES

THOMAS EDGAR ROTHMAN, OF MARYLAND, TO BE A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON THE ARTS FOR A TERM EXPIRING SEPTEMBER 3, 2016.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

STEVEN MICHAEL HARO, OF VIRGINIA, TO BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF COMMERCE.