

ways to keep our law enforcement officers and communities safe.

I applaud the Senate for passing this, I urge the House to quickly pass it, and I know the President will sign it.

I yield the floor.

TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2016—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, in 1867, when the naturalist John Muir first walked into the Cumberland Mountains, he wrote: "The scenery is far grander than any I ever before beheld. . . . Such an ocean of wooded, waving, swelling mountain beauty and grandeur is not to be described." In January, Apex Clean Energy announced that it would spoil that mountain beauty by building twenty-three 45-story wind turbines in Cumberland County.

I can still recall walking into Grassy Cove in Cumberland County one spectacular day in 1978 during my campaign for Governor. I had not seen a prettier site. Over the last few decades, pleasant weather and natural beauty have attracted thousands of retirees from Tennessee and across America to the Cumberland Plateau.

The proposed Crab Orchard Wind project would be built less than 10 miles from Cumberland Mountain State Park, where for half a century Tennesseans and tourists have camped, fished, and canoed alongside herons and belted kingfishers and around Byrd Lake. It will be less than 5 miles from the scenic Ozone Falls State Natural Area, where the 110-foot waterfall is so picturesque, it was filmed as scenery in the movie "Jungle Book."

So here are my 10 questions for the citizens of Cumberland County and the people of Tennessee:

How big are these wind turbines?

I have a picture somewhere; maybe it will show up in the next few minutes. Each one is over two times as tall as the skyboxes at the University of Tennessee football stadium, three times as tall as Ozone Falls, and taller than the Statue of Liberty. The blades on each one are as long as a football field. Their blinking lights can be seen for 20 miles. They are not your grandma's windmills.

Question No. 2: Will they disturb the neighborhood?

Here is what a New York Times review of the documentary "Windfall" said about New York residents debating such turbines:

Turbines are huge . . . with blades weighing seven tons and spinning at 150 miles an hour. They can fall over or send parts flying; struck by lightning, say, they can catch fire . . . and can generate a disorienting strobe effect in sunlight. Giant flickering shadows can tarnish a sunset's glow on a landscape.

Question No. 3: How much electricity can the project produce?

A puny amount—71 megawatts. But that is only when the wind is blowing, which in Tennessee is only 18.4 percent of the time, according to the Energy Information Administration.

Question No. 4: Does TVA need this electricity?

The answer is no. Last year TVA said there is "no immediate need for new base load plants after Watts Bar Unit 2 comes online." That is a nuclear reactor. And just last week TVA put up for sale its unfinished Bellefonte nuclear plant.

Question No. 5: Do we need wind power's carbon-free electricity to help with climate change?

No, we don't. Nuclear power is a more reliable option. Nuclear produces over 60 percent of our country's carbon-free electricity, which is available 92 percent of the time. Wind produces 15 percent of our country's carbon-free electricity, but the wind often blows at night when electricity is not needed.

Question No. 6: How many wind turbines would it take to equal one nuclear reactor?

To equal the production of the new Watts Bar reactor, you would have to run three rows of these huge wind turbines along I-40 from Memphis to Knoxville. And don't forget the transmission lines. Four reactors, each occupying roughly 1 square mile, would equal the production of a row of 45-story wind turbines strung the entire length of the 2,178-mile Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine. Relying on wind power to produce electricity when nuclear reactors are available is the energy equivalent of going to war in sailboats when a nuclear navy is available.

Question No. 7: Can you easily store large amounts of wind power and use it later when you need it? The answer is no.

Question No. 8: So even if you build wind turbines, do you still need nuclear, coal, or gas plants for the 80 percent of the time when the wind isn't blowing in Tennessee? The answer is yes.

Question No. 9: Then why would anyone want to build wind power that TVA doesn't need?

Because billions of dollars of wasteful Federal taxpayer subsidies allow wind producers in some markets to give away wind power and still make a profit.

The 10th question: Who is going to guarantee that these giant wind turbines get taken down when they wear out in 20 years and after the subsidies go away?

Good question. The picture that was just put up—and I have another slide as well—is what Palm Springs, CA, looks like after it has been littered with these massive wind turbines. My question for the people of Tennessee is, Do you want Cumberland County and Tennessee to look like that? That is the question we need to ask ourselves.

Many communities where wind projects have been proposed have tried

to stop them before they go up because once the wind turbines and new transmission lines are built, it is hard to take them down. For example, watch the documentary "Windfall" that I mentioned earlier.

In October, the residents of Irasburg, VT, voted 274 to 9 against a plan to install a pair of 500-foot turbines on a ridge line visible from their neighborhood.

In New York, three counties opposed 500- to 600-foot wind turbines next to Lake Ontario. People in the town of Yates voted unanimously to oppose the project in order to "preserve their rural landscape." Take a look, and you can see why.

In Kent County, MD, the same company that is trying to put turbines in Cumberland County—Apex Clean Energy—tried to put down twenty-five to thirty-five 500-foot turbines a quarter to a half mile apart across thousands of acres of farmland where the air serves as a route for migratory geese.

According to the Baltimore Sun, Stephen S. Hershey, Jr., a local State legislator, had introduced a bill that would give county officials the right to veto any large-scale wind project in their jurisdiction. Hershey said he put the bill in after learning that the turbines would be nearly 500 feet tall and spread across an area of thousands of acres. He called that a "massive" footprint "in a relatively rural and bucolic area."

William Pickrum, president of the Board of County Commissioners, wrote the Senate committee that the project "will certainly have a negative effect" on farming, boating, and tourism in the county and hurt property values. The legislation had the support of local conservation groups and of Washington College in Chestertown. The school's interim president, Jack S. Griswold, warned in a letter to school staff and supporters that the turbines would "despoil this scenic landscape."

I mentioned a little earlier how big these wind turbines are. These are not your grandma's windmills. I happen to know, even though the Presiding Officer is from North Carolina, he was born in Tennessee and knows a little bit about the football stadium in Knoxville.

This is one wind turbine, when placed in Neyland Stadium in Knoxville, which will hold 102,000 people. The turbine is over twice as tall as the skyboxes. Its blades go the whole length of the football field. Its blinking lights can be seen for 20 miles. These are not your grandma's windmills.

As a U.S. Senator, I voted to save our mountaintops from destructive mining techniques. I am just as eager to protect mountaintops from unsightly wind turbines. I have voted for Federal clean air legislation and supported TVA's plan to build carbon-free nuclear reactors, phase out its older, dirtier coal plants, and put pollution control equipment on the remaining coal plants. Already the air is cleaner and our view of the mountains is better.

I hope citizens of Cumberland County—and all Tennesseans—will say a loud “no” to the out-of-State wind producers that are encouraged by billions in wasteful taxpayer subsidies to destroy our mountains and make them look like that.

Some say tourists will come to see the giant turbines. They may—once. But do we really think tourists or most Tennesseans want to exchange a drive through the natural beauty of the Cumberland Mountains for a drive along 23 towers that are more than twice as tall as Neyland Stadium and whose flashing lights can be seen for 20 miles? If you do, just take another look at the photograph of what has happened in Palm Springs, CA.

If there is one thing Tennesseans agree on, it is the pride in the natural beauty of our State. There are few places more beautiful than Cumberland County. We should not allow anyone to destroy the environment of our State in the name of saving.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

OPiate EPIDEMIC

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I rise, as I have for the past few weeks, to bring stories of the opiate crisis that we have throughout my State, the Presiding Officer's State of North Carolina, and all over this country.

This epidemic is something we have to face because it affects every person in America right now. There is not a person I know of and not anyone, I believe, in America who doesn't know somebody in their immediate family, extended family, or close friend who hasn't been affected by prescription drug abuse or illicit drug abuse.

I have been dealing with this since my days as Governor of the great State of West Virginia. As the Presiding Officer knows, it has ravaged my State. We have been hit harder than any other State in the country. Drug overdoses have soared by over 700 percent since 1999. Just last year alone, we lost over 600 West Virginians to opioids. These are legal prescription drugs that are made legally in the country by a legal manufacturer of pharmaceuticals. They are approved by the Food and Drug Administration, a Federal agency that is supposed to look out for our well-being. They are being prescribed by the most trusted person next to our family members, our doctors, and they are killing us.

Our State is not unique in that it has hit everybody. Fifty-one Americans are dying every day—every day. We have lost over 200,000 Americans. Two hundred thousand Americans have died since 1999. If we think about that in epidemic proportions—we are talking about Zika. We just put \$1.1 billion toward Zika. We spent \$500 million on Ebola. All of these horrible epidemics that can cause devastation in America, we will rise up and face. We haven't done a thing in this line. We need a se-

rious culture change to get through the problem, and we need to change approval of opiate drugs. Basically, FDA does not need to be putting out these powerful drugs. We don't need them. Think about the United States of America. Less than 5 percent of the world's population lives in our great country. Yet we consume over 80 percent of the opiates produced in the world. How did we become the most addicted? How did we become so intolerant to pain that we have to have the most powerful drugs ever produced? We have to treat the way we look at this drug coming to the market.

Also, 10, 20 years ago, anybody who did drugs, if they committed a crime, we put them in jail. We have spent over \$500 billion in the last two decades incarcerating people for nonviolent crimes. They come out as bad as they went in. We haven't cured anything. We have to change. We are looking at sentencing guideline changes on nonviolent crime—nonsexual, nonviolent crime. Most addicts commit thievery. That is a theft. It is larceny. That is where they get their sentencing from. So they get sentenced, they get a criminal record, and they can't get a job. They are out of the market.

My State of West Virginia has the lowest workforce participation. Only three things take you out of the workforce if you are an adult: If you have an incarceration record, people will not hire you; if you have a lack of skill sets; if you are addicted, you can't pass a drug test—or a combination of those three.

Something is going on. We can't fill jobs. People are telling me how bad the economy is. Then I talk to the employers who say: We can't get people to pass a drug test. We can't get people into the marketplace. So it is something we have to do.

My office continues to get flooded. I get letters from all over the country now because I invite that. I want them. Let me read your letter. Let's put a face and let's put a family on it. It is not just a hardship, it is not just poverty, it is basically every walk of life in America. They are writing stories.

I want to read another story to you right now. This is Carolyn's story. This is the grandmother writing to me:

Dear Senator Manchin,

I am enclosing a copy of the letter I sent to “The Journal” in Martinsburg concerning the death of our son's step-daughter. She died of a heroin overdose.

I consider myself Devon's grandmother, and at my age words are my best weapon to fight the scourge that killed her.

Please, Senator, read my letter and then use it in any way you see fit in the fight for the passage of “Jessie's Law.”

We have talked about Jessie's Law. The Presiding Officer has been helpful, and I appreciate it very much. It basically says: If you go to the hospital and you know your child or a loved one in your family is addicted and the child is trying to overcome the addiction, then the hospital has the responsibility to stamp on their record “addiction” so

they will be watching how they discharge them and the type of opiates they give them. You can't reaffirm an addiction by giving more pills. So this is what we are fighting against.

She said:

Our granddaughter, Devon, that tall exuberant redhead who laughed her way into our hearts, is now a statistic. Several days ago our son called us to tell us that she had died the night before from a heroin over-dose.

It wasn't her first over-dose by far, but the other times someone had always managed to get her to the hospital. That last time the friend shooting up with her couldn't help. He died at her side. She still held the needle in her hand [that killed her].

It was that quick.

Devon started her drug journey with prescription opiates.

She had been injured, she had an ailment, and she had pain.

When those pills weren't enough anymore, heroin stepped in, and the downward spiral began.

Heroin steps in every time.

It isn't just the problem kids from poor neighborhoods who get hooked, you know.

Everybody thinks it is because of the economic downturn. That is a part of it but not all of it.

Our granddaughter came from a stable, affectionate upper-middle class home. Even though her parents tried their best to save her with countless sleepless nights, multiple trips to rehab, tough love and loving persuasion, that drug won the battle.

Now, we are not even allowed to grieve. We must also contend with the many forms of our anger; impatience with Devon for not being stronger, rage at those who sold her the drugs, frustration with the authorities for not doing more to stop the trafficking or establishing more treatment centers, and self-recrimination for maybe not doing enough. We also are trying to cope with the guilt of feeling relief that her hell has finally ended. There is nothing more we can do for her now, no more treatments that we can try.

Can you imagine living with that? You tried everything, and then, finally, when the end comes like that, you have a feeling of relief—and then you feel remorse for that. Can you imagine grandparents going through this?

Finally:

She's just gone. Just . . . gone . . .

People are now coming out. Before, people didn't want to tell me. They were afraid. They had a son or a daughter in rehab, and they felt that would be a scourge on their family. They didn't want to be embarrassed. So we never knew about it. It was a silent killer.

Then we saw young people—going through the obituaries, it doesn't give the cause of death, but we can pretty much figure it out.

People are now saying: If we don't come out of the closet and talk about it, we are not going to fix it. There is a lot that needs to be done.

I am going to read another story that has a happy ending. I am going to read Chelsea's story, which I have read before.

This is a young girl from Boone County, WV. This young girl had started using drugs when she was 12 years

old—12 years old. Anything and everything that could happen to a human being—her dad was mayor of the town. He was mayor. She had gone through everything, hit bottom as far as bottom could be. The person she went through drug court and drug rehab with died, couldn't get out. She made it.

I am going to read hers now so we see a happy ending. Most of these stories are about the pain and heartache associated with opiate abuse, but Chelsea's story is a little different. In February, on the Senator floor, I read Chelsea Carter's powerful story on how she has overcome her opiate addiction, and today I am proud to say she just received her master's degree in social work from Concord University.

She said:

After being addicted to drugs since I was 12 years old [by a neighborhood friend], I decided to go back to school and teach others what I have been taught my whole life.

I received my bachelor's degree from West Virginia University in the Art of Psychology in May of 2013 and last Saturday May 7, 2016 I graduated with my Masters in Social Work from Concord University.

I am currently working on my Alcohol and Drug Counseling Licensure and also myself and seven other people are in the process of opening up a Sober Living home in Danville, West Virginia [her home area] called the Hero House.

They get no funding. They don't qualify for Medicaid, Medicare—nothing. What they are going to do is all going to be on love and kindness. Also, with the record she has now—because she has a felony record for grand larceny—it will be hard for her to get a job. We are taking a person now with a master's degree out of the workforce. It is unbelievable.

She said:

I currently work for Appalachian Health Services as an addiction therapist—

They went beyond that and hired her anyway. Most people will not.

—but my dream is to one day open my own inpatient treatment facility and help other people who are just like me.

A message I would like people to know is that recovery is possible, but you have to be willing to work at it.

It is a lot easier to go out on the streets and buy drugs instead of trying to change your life, but the one thing that recovery gives you that the drugs will never is your life back.

I am living proof that if you want something bad enough you can change.

We have to give them hope. We have to give them reasons. We have to give them the ability to get back in the mainstream. This is the best example of what can be done if we make investments, and the investments we make are investments in human capital in the United States of America and the spirit of America. This is what we are doing.

For the many stories I read that have such horrible endings, this has a happy ending, and it helps many people.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from West Virginia. He has been a tiger on this issue, and I hope we will answer his call. The epidemic is no better in Connecticut, where most of our cities are on track to see a doubling of overdose deaths this year from last year, and last year was quadruple the number it was 3 or 4 years ago. I say thank you very much to my colleague from West Virginia.

AMENDMENT NO. 3897

Mr. President, I am on the floor today to talk about an amendment to the pending bill. It is an issue that a lot of us thought was decided by this body decades ago; that is, the prohibition of discrimination in housing based on race, sex, religion, national origin, physical or mental disability, and family status. It is the Fair Housing Act.

In many ways, the Fair Housing Act was the culmination of the legislative fight for civil rights in the 1960s. It was the first effective Federal law guarding against discrimination in the sale and the rental of housing in the United States. For nearly 50 years, it has been employed to ensure that every American can choose where to live, free from discrimination and the immoral and unconstitutional consequences of residential segregation.

We have come a long way since the 1960s, but we are by no means all the way there. Today, discrimination is still a reality in housing markets across the country. In every single State, there are cases of landlords misrepresenting the availability of housing or outright refusing to sell or rent to certain protected individuals or groups of people. There are others who are given different terms and conditions on a mortgage or on a rental contract, based on their race, their gender, or their physical disability. I hear these stories even in my State of Connecticut, which is a pretty progressive State.

For instance, Crystal Carter was a homeless single mother living in Hartford, CT, with her five children, one of whom is developmentally disabled. This is what she said, in her own words:

For two years, my family had jumped between homeless shelters and staying with family and friends. I had searched for affordable housing for several hours a day, every day, and submitted dozens of applications. Then, I found out about an open waiting list for rental vouchers in a suburban area. I was excited at the chance to move to a safer area with better schools for my children. But when I called the suburban housing authority that managed the program, I was told I couldn't even have an application because I didn't already live in one of the approved nearby towns. I was also told that it was someplace I wouldn't want to live anyway and that I should be looking in Hartford or Bridgeport instead.

Johnnie Dailey is another victim of housing discrimination. Here is Johnnie's story:

In 2013, I was searching for a new home for my family, including my young niece and grandson. I found a single-family home that would have been perfect for my family. It

was on a quiet street where my niece and grandson could play outside, and the rent was less than my current apartment. My real estate agent called the listing agent for the property and told her that I was very interested in renting the property and that I had a Section 8 voucher. The listing agent responded that the owner of the property, a Boston-based company, would not rent to me because they were not interested in accepting a Section 8 voucher. I was discriminated against and denied the opportunity to rent the property solely because I am someone who uses a Section 8 voucher to pay part of my rent. To this day, when I think about the discrimination I experienced, I feel upset and embarrassed.

Crystal's and Johnnie's stories are two of tens of thousands of stories from across the country that underscore the need for the Fair Housing Act. We have made progress, but we aren't done. While the Fair Housing Act rose out of the fight for civil rights for African Americans, we also need to remember today that over half of all reported complaints of housing discrimination are initiated by people with disabilities. There are veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with debilitating injuries that have altered their lives completely. These individuals also include a growing number of elderly Americans who are living with disabilities.

As a Nation, we know we are stronger and better when we assure access and opportunity for all Americans, including the 57 million Americans who are living with disabilities today.

Unfortunately, civil rights laws are under attack today. It is not a position that is endorsed wholesale by the Republican Party, but there is a coordinated effort on the right to use every tool possible to strip civil rights protections from African Americans, Hispanics, the disabled, and the poor. We saw this in the successful campaign to get the Supreme Court to invalidate portions of the Voting Rights Act.

Now on the floor of the Senate, we are talking about an amendment that would gut the enforcement of the Fair Housing Act. This amendment, which is offered by my friend Senator LEE, would effectively stop the Department of Housing and Urban Development from being able to enforce the Fair Housing Act. The law would stay on the books, but the Department couldn't enforce some of the most important elements.

One of the elements, passed in the 1960s, is an affirmative requirement that States and cities take steps to remedy discrimination that exists in their community. The Fair Housing Act, which is a bedrock of our civil rights laws, has held for decades that it isn't enough to band discrimination based on race, disability, or gender. Local jurisdictions have to do something to make discrimination less likely for renters and home buyers. This isn't new; this has been on the books since the 1960s. But a few years ago, GAO discovered in a report that most localities weren't doing this; they were ignoring that aspect of the law. Appropriately, HUD clarified the obligations

under this section of the Fair Housing Act so that cities and towns know exactly what they need to do to assess the scope of discrimination in their area and to better understand their obligations under the act to fix the problems.

Senator LEE's amendment would strip from HUD the ability to enforce this part of the law, and that is a shame. We can close our eyes, box our ears, and pretend discrimination doesn't exist, but if that is what my Republican friends want to do, it is a grievous mistake. We aren't in a post-racial world. We don't live in a society where the disabled always get a fair shake. Discrimination exists, and the Federal Government, since the beginning of this Republic, has taken seriously its moral and constitutional responsibility to ensure that everyone living under the protection of this government gets an equal chance at success—no matter their race, their gender, their ability, or their disability.

I am dismayed that 50 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, and the Fair Housing Act, the fundamental civil rights that have been granted to every American still need to be continually shielded from attempts to dismantle them. Any limitation or reversal on HUD's ability to enforce the Fair Housing Act would for us, as a Senate, be to ignore the moral compass that has guided our Nation's commitment to civil rights over decades and decades of progress.

I am encouraged that Chairwoman COLLINS and Ranking Member REED both intend to oppose the Lee amendment. I urge all of my colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

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

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

The bill 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.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I am waiting on Senator REID, who will be coming here to make a motion with regard to the Zika crisis. While we have a moment, I want to set the table.

Can you imagine being a pregnant woman in the southern part of the United States this summer in a poor county that does not have the funds for mosquito control? That pregnant woman knows that if she gets bitten by the aegypti mosquito carrying the Zika virus, there is a good chance the virus is going to infect the baby in her womb and could have consequences, all of which we have seen in these very disturbing photos of children born with deformed heads.

As a matter of fact, the doctors in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tell us that the baby can be born with no abnormalities but the ab-

normalities appear later in the child's development after birth. Can you imagine being a pregnant woman in the southern part of the United States in a poor county—a poor county such as counties in the State of the Presiding Officer—that doesn't have the funds for mosquito control? What about a rich county that has run out of funds budgeted for mosquito control?

If you are going to control the Zika virus, you either have to have a vaccine, which they are working on, or you have to be able to stop the mosquito from being able to reproduce. They are working on genetic alterations, but both of those take time. In the meantime, there is only one thing to do.

Mr. CORNYN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. NELSON. I want to finish my statement.

In the meantime, if you don't have a vaccine and you don't have the ability to stop the mosquito population, the particular strain that carries the virus, there is only one thing to do, and that is mosquito control. That is what local counties, cities, and States are begging us now, as was indicated by the letter that I introduced from Osceola County, which is right next to the county of Orlando, Orange County. It is a relatively well-off, affluent county, but they don't have any more mosquito control funds. As we go into this summer with the rains, that raises the concern that it doesn't have to be a pond with stagnant water; it can be a bottle cap that is filled with water where the mosquito lays her larvae and they hatch.

Yes, I will yield to the distinguished Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I appreciate the Senator from Florida yielding for a question.

I wish to ask the question, Is the Senator aware that \$580 million of unspent Ebola funds has been reprogrammed by the Obama administration as a down payment on dealing with this impending crisis?

Mr. NELSON. Indeed, this Senator is aware of that. Thank goodness there was this pot of money so that the administration could start this because we haven't been doing anything in Congress to produce the emergency appropriations. Thank goodness there was a pot of money they could borrow.

Did you know that there is Ebola that is erupting in Western Africa right now? Don't we have a responsibility to replenish that Ebola fund?

Mr. President, I said I was going to talk until Leader REID arrived. He is here, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have had a long, pleasant relationship with the senior Senator from Florida. We served in the House together. We have served in the Senate together. I have great admiration for him and his loving wife Grace, and I am happy to be on the floor with him today. People in Florida

are so fortunate to have this good man representing them.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 3038

Mr. President, look at this map behind me. There are two types of mosquitoes that carry this disease—this condition, this virus. We see this map here, which covers 39 States. It goes without saying that they are not subtropical States. They are not Florida. They are not Louisiana or southern Texas. They are places like Boulder, CO, and Las Vegas, NV. Are those States subtropical? No, I don't think so. We get 4 inches of rain a year. It goes up into Maine.

This is a serious issue which will affect 39 States. As the weather warms, the mosquitos will multiply and people will be bitten by these vicious little insects.

Mosquitos have been causing problems in the world for centuries, but never to anyone's knowledge has a mosquito caused the types of birth defects that are now happening with the Zika virus.

The virus was discovered in 1947 or 1948 in Uganda. In fact, "Zika" is the name of a forest there and means "overgrown." Over the decades, something has happened and these mosquitos have become so dangerous.

This virus is a threat to people living in these areas, and it is as real as it gets. Right now, the focal point is on two places, but it is changing as we speak. The American citizens of Puerto Rico have been hammered. That poor territory of ours has had so many problems—all the money problems they are having, compounded by the fact that tourism is being damaged significantly as a result of this Zika virus.

It is not only the birth defects this virus causes, which are so repugnant and scary, but this virus also has the ability to create very serious problems with paralysis in human beings. It has happened, and there are already reported cases of that.

This is a ravaging problem. Puerto Rico now has almost 1,000 reported cases, which include at least 128 pregnant women and probably more. One citizen died in Puerto Rico as a direct result of the Zika virus. It is estimated that 20 percent of the Puerto Rican people—or 3½ million—will be infected with this virus. We are talking 700,000 American citizens.

As of May 11, there were 1,200 Zika cases on the mainland, and Senator NELSON has talked about that in detail—as well he should as a representative of that State. No State is on the frontlines of this ravaging problem more than the State of Florida. It is a nightmare, and who knows how long before this map becomes our national nightmare. No one is making this up. This is serious.

Somehow, the Republican-controlled Congress still hasn't sent a bill to the President's desk to provide emergency funding so we can fight this devastating virus.

If we were here talking about a national emergency—floods, fires, earthquakes, all of the many issues we often come to the floor to talk about—my friend from Texas is on the floor. How many times have we come to this floor to help the State of Texas? We have helped Texas so many times, and we were all glad to do it, to pass emergency supplemental bills to help the citizens of the State of Texas. There is no reason that I can understand why we don't have a piece of legislation on the floor just like we would if there were a flood, fire, or some other emergency in a State. But, no, we are going through a process that will never end in time to take care of the problem.

Under the present process we have, this emergency spending is part of the appropriations bill. Everyone knows that the House can't even get a budget. They can't do their appropriations bills. How are we going to take these issues to conference when the House can't even come up with a budget? I don't know how we can do it any sooner than sometime toward the end of this fiscal year, which is September or October. By then, the summer will be beginning to be gone, but the mosquitos and the devastation they have left will not be gone.

Experts tell us they need this money and they need it now. Yesterday I met with the President's Director of Management and Budget, Sean Donovan, and it is clear that they desperately need this money.

It sounds as if my friend from Texas is saying: We have the Ebola money; use that. They are still working on Ebola. What was the emergency we had here 2 years ago? It was Ebola. What did we do? We provided the money so they could do the research to alleviate the spread of this scourge, and they are doing that now. We are robbing Peter to pay Paul. That is actually what we are doing.

The \$1.1 billion for Zika that we invoked cloture on yesterday is a bandaid. It is not enough. Congress isn't moving fast enough to give the researchers, doctors, and public health officials what they need to combat this virus.

Now the House is going to make it even worse by passing a bill for \$622 million. What would you guess they are going to use to fund this money? Let's see. What could it be? Oh, maybe ObamaCare, which they have tried to defeat 67 times, and each time it ends up the same. Einstein's definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. That is what we have with the House Republicans, and I am sorry to say this, but it has spilled over here too. They haven't tried to eliminate it over here that many times but as many times as they could. They are going to come up with a bill to provide \$622 million, which will come from a number of resources, but it will principally be ObamaCare money. And \$622 million is a fraction of what is needed. It is ap-

proximately 25 percent of what is really needed.

To say that the appropriations process is too slow is a gross understatement. We need to get this done now. I don't know when, if ever, these appropriations bills will be signed into law.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has been at the forefront of all of these dreaded problems we have had in recent decades. He was a leading advocate scientifically during the AIDS epidemic we had. Here is what he said: "When you've got an emergency situation, you really need to get funding as quickly as possible."

The time to act is now. This summer, when Zika is on the news every day, which it will be, Senators will regret that they did not act quickly to address this crisis.

I urge my colleagues to take care of this today and provide the \$1.9 billion in emergency money, just as we have done with any other national emergency we have taken care of on this floor numerous times, and do it in a procedural way that will get the money to them the quickest.

Mr. President, at this time I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 157, H.R. 3038; that all after the enacting clause be stricken; that the Nelson substitute amendment to enhance a Federal response and preparedness with respect to the Zika virus, which is at the desk, be agreed to; that there be up to 1 hour of debate equally divided between the two leaders or their designees; that upon the use or yielding back of time, the bill, as amended, be read a third time and the Senate vote on passage of the bill, as amended, and there be no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, our Democratic colleagues won't take yes for an answer. Yesterday the Murray-Blunt language, which now the Democratic leader calls a bandaid, actually obtained cloture, and I expect it will pass tomorrow as part of the underlying appropriations bill.

Mr. President, \$1.1 billion on top of the \$585 million that has already been reprogrammed from the Ebola fund to be used to combat the Zika virus is not a bandaid; it is a serious effort in a nonpartisan way to address a public health challenge.

As we can see from the map, Texas is right in the crosshairs. We are ground zero in the United States, along with Florida, Louisiana, and other Southern States where this mosquito is present. Thank goodness no mosquito-borne transmission has occurred yet. But I agree with my colleague from Florida. This is a serious matter, and we need to treat it seriously, but that is not what is happening now.

This is a bill that the Senate defeated cloture on yesterday, and this is

an attempt to end run that defeat of a vote before the entire Senate. I am compelled to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Democratic leader.

Mr. REID. I don't know what my friend from Texas is going to tell the people from Texas this summer when there is no money available. We heard the Senator from Florida talk about the need for local governments to prepare for this virus. Some of this stuff is pretty straightforward.

How do you get rid of mosquitoes? You can't wish them away. They don't go away that way. We get rid of mosquitoes by mosquito control, and that takes money. Where does that money come from? It comes from local governments. That is why Florida is desperate for money, and they will be desperate for that money in Texas and everywhere else. Using the logic of my friend from Texas, don't worry about it. We will get you some money this fall. The money we voted on yesterday at the very earliest will not come until we wrap up our appropriations bills.

I remind everyone that the House is stuck. They can't do appropriations bills because they don't have a budget. They can't get people to agree to what they want to do. My friend PAUL RYAN has seen what John Boehner had to put up with all of those years before they ran him away from the Speakership, and he is having the same problem. This man who talked about budgeting—that was his key. He was the idea man. PAUL RYAN can't get a budget with his own Republicans in the House.

I think that my friend is saying: We got a downpayment. We took the money from Ebola. We will worry about Ebola later, and maybe we will borrow that money from someplace else to continue our research on Ebola.

Senator SCHUMER mentioned in a meeting we had a short time ago that the one thing he remembered about the last time Dr. Fauci came to our caucus and talked about this dread problem was that he said that the National Institutes of Health is very close to coming up with a vaccine for this. But we take this money—just like when we had sequestration, they were close to a flu vaccine, and that is gone. You have to do it when you can, and right now is an opportunity for us to do something to save the lives of people and especially these unborn infants.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I apologize to the Democratic leader. Apparently I wasn't able to communicate my point, which is that there is already \$580 million available today to combat the Zika virus. Finally, the administration took the advice of those on this side of the aisle and said: Let's take the unused Ebola funds to fight it today while we have an orderly process by which we appropriate the money in a responsible way.

I think the Senator from Washington, Mrs. MURRAY, and Senator BLUNT, the chairman and ranking member of the appropriations subcommittee, have done a good job of winnowing down the \$1.9 billion request to the \$1.1 billion which I agree is the right figure. While we have some other differences, I think the Senate is acting in a responsible and bipartisan way, which is the only way things can actually get done around here.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it wasn't because of the good graces of the Members of the Republican Senate that President Obama took the money from Ebola and put it into fighting the problems we have with Zika. The President asked for this money 3 months ago. They took that money out of desperation because they had no other place to go for the money. That money is not sitting there waiting to be spent; it has been spent.

They need money. They are out of money. There is no more robbing Peter to pay Paul. This is an emergency, and it should be handled now because under the process we have, the earliest there will be help for this will be this fall.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I thank the Chair.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 3038

I have to say that I am really disappointed that Republicans once again rejected the administration's full emergency supplemental package.

It has been more than 3 months since President Obama first put forward a proposal to fight this Zika virus. He laid out what he thought he needed to respond to a crisis in a way that protected our families the best. His administration was here. They testified at hearing after hearing after hearing about the details of this proposal and made it clear that there was absolutely no reason for Congress to wait.

But, for months, our Republican leaders did nothing. They delayed. They came up with one excuse after another. They ignored the experts, ignored the scientists, and ignored the facts.

Some Republicans were saying that Zika wasn't something they were willing to give the administration a penny more for. Others said they would think about more money to fight Zika but only in return for partisan spending cuts. And others spent more time thinking about how to get political cover rather than actually trying to address this enormous problem.

But many of us knew how important this was, and we were not going to give up. We kept the pressure on. We kept pushing to get serious about dealing with this emergency, and we made sure that the mothers and fathers across the country who are scared and who wanted their government to fight this horrific virus had a voice in this process.

So while it shouldn't have taken so long, I am glad that this week many of our Republican colleagues in the Senate did finally join us at the table to open up a path for an important step forward. This was a compromise proposal, and it certainly isn't what I would have written on my own.

For example, I want to note that throughout this process, I have made it clear that a top priority of mine is making sure that women do have access to reproductive health care in light of the impacts of this virus. So I was disappointed that the Republicans insisted on including unnecessary language that simply reiterates the pre-existing ban on Federal funding for abortions.

But this bipartisan agreement that we voted on yesterday would support community health centers and other providers in making sure that women have access to contraception and other critical health care. It would help make sure that women in Zika-affected areas have the ability to plan their families and prevent these tragedies, like so many we have already seen, especially compared to the House legislation that includes no support for preventive health care or outreach for family planning. I believe these resources are extremely critical, and I am going to keep fighting to continue getting us to expand this to the full range of reproductive health care that women need.

We also didn't get the full amount we had hoped for in this compromise. Democrats still believe that Congress should give the President the full funding this administration has asked for and needs.

But I am glad that, with every Democrat and 23 Republicans willing to do the right thing, we are going to pass a \$1.1 billion down payment on the President's proposal and do it as an emergency bill without offsets—the way it ought to be.

So I want to thank Senator BLUNT, who worked with me to get this done, as well as my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who voted for it. Our bipartisan agreement will provide direct investments with a Zika response in Puerto Rico. It will ramp up prevention and support services for pregnant women and invest in foreign aid for Latin America and the Caribbean. It will help accelerate development of a vaccine and backfill nearly \$100 million in funding the administration was forced to reprogram due to the Republicans' refusal to act.

Our agreement would accelerate the administration's work and allow money to start flowing to address this crisis, even as we continue to ask for more as needed.

Unfortunately, now we know that House Republicans have gone in a very different direction. They released an underfunded, partisan—and, frankly, in my opinion—mean-spirited bill that would provide only \$622 million, which is less than a third of what is needed

for this emergency, without any funding for preventive health care or family planning or even outreach to those who are at risk of getting the Zika virus.

They are still insisting that funding for this public health emergency be fully offset and that the administration should siphon the money away from the critical Ebola response and from other essential activities in order to fund Zika efforts.

The choice between the Senate and the House Zika bills is a choice between acting to protect women and families and doing nothing at all. It is a choice between a bipartisan compromise that takes an important step forward to address this emergency and a partisan embarrassment that is intended to do nothing more than provide Members with political cover. That doesn't solve this emergency.

The partisan House bill is a non-starter, but we do have a path forward. The Senate bill has the support of Democrats and Republicans. It can move through the House, it can be signed into law, and it can get resources moving quickly to tackle this emergency quickly.

So let's get this bill to the House as quickly as possible. Every Democrat and a little less than half of the Republicans supported the bill. Let's send it to the House right now and urge them to pass it as quickly as possible.

There is no reason to keep it attached to this bill we are on and allow House Republicans to get it and slow-walk it into the fall, as our leader suggested would happen. There is no reason this funding cannot be approved and signed into law next week in time for the summer and the peak of mosquito season, which the Senator from Florida knows is coming very rapidly.

It has the support of the Senate on its own. Let's send it to the House on its own. Women and families in this country have been looking to Congress for action on Zika for months, and we here in the Senate—and House Republicans—should not make them wait any longer.

So I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 157, H.R. 3038; that all after the enacting clause be stricken; that the Blunt-Murray substitute amendment to enhance the Federal response and preparedness with respect to the Zika virus be agreed to; that there be up to 1 hour of debate, equally divided between the two leaders or their designees; that upon the use or yielding back of time, the bill, as amended, be read a third time and the Senate vote on passage of the bill, as amended, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, again, our colleagues won't take yes for an answer. The amendment of the Senator from

Washington, along with Senator BLUNT, the chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee responsible for this, actually obtained cloture and will pass tomorrow—tomorrow—as part of this underlying appropriations bill, assuming that there are no other objections or that people want to finish that legislation. So I don't really understand why they continue to refuse to take yes for an answer.

I would say to my friend from Washington: Would the Senator modify her request to include my language at the desk, which has the exact same funding levels as the Blunt-Murray amendment but includes a pay-for using the prevention fund in the Affordable Care Act?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator from Washington so modify her request?

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, let me just say that the spending bill that this has now been attached to may take months—into the fall or even into the winter months—before it is approved. The Zika virus isn't going to wait for the winter months. The mosquitoes are here now, and they will continue to move very rapidly across the country, as our leader has outlined before. So taking it out of this bill—it has now been approved by a number of Senators on a bipartisan basis—and moving it quickly to the House and getting it to the President's desk means they will have the resources as quickly as possible to deal with this and to begin to deal with this in a responsible way.

Secondly, let me just say that the request that the Senator from Texas has just broached means that we are going to have to fight over cuts—cuts to women, cuts to families, cuts to critical health care efforts in order to fight the Zika virus. That is objectionable. This is an emergency supplemental, as we agreed to yesterday, and it needs to move forward that way. So I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Is there objection to the original request?

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I wish to respond briefly to my friend from Washington. The prevention fund that was created by the Affordable Care Act that is part of the President's signature health care bill has more than adequate money in it to pay for the research, the mosquito eradication, and the other services that are necessary. It is not depriving anyone of money that they otherwise would have coming.

What it does do is it alleviates the financial burden on future generations to actually pay the money back that we insist on spending without providing for adequate offsets. So increasing deficits is why the national debt has almost doubled under this President because of the reckless spending.

We are trying to do this in a responsible, bipartisan, and, indeed, I would

say, nonpartisan sort of way, but apparently that is not acceptable to our friends on the other side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator object?

Mr. CORNYN. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I have listened attentively to the debate over the last 15 minutes about Zika, and it has been very entertaining to me. But it has also been interesting just to hear the numbers being thrown around. There is a series of numbers being thrown around as if it is an apples-to-apples comparison.

So let me try to break down a few things with an apples-to-apples comparison about Zika and the funding.

The President has asked for \$1.9 billion for Zika. The Senate has now responded back to say: We will do the \$500 million the President has already moved over from Ebola funding and add to it \$1.1 billion to come up with about \$1.6 billion—almost \$1.7 billion—so about \$200 million short, which is being declared as grossly inadequate. That is 0.2 short from what the President had asked for.

There is also being thrown around the House proposal, saying the House proposal is grossly inadequate to be able to cover what is being discussed there because it is a little over \$600 million. The President wants \$1.9 billion, and the House is offering \$600 million. But what is not being stated is that what the Senate has done and what the President has asked for is \$1.9 billion over 2 years. The House has said a little over \$600 million this year and added to the Ebola funding that was already there—meaning \$1.1 billion this year and then in our normal appropriations process to take it up again next year. It may be the same amount.

It has become very fascinating to me to hear some say: Well, they are cutting it in half, and it is insulting and it is all these things.

I think to myself: It is the same numbers. They are just cutting the times to be able to break it down into different numbers.

So all of these number games are very interesting, but they still don't drive at one essential thing. We do need to deal with Zika, but we also need to deal with Zika in a fiscally responsible way. The assumption that to deal with Zika means we have to throw the budget out and there is no way we can find \$1 billion in a \$4 trillion budget to cover Zika is laughable.

So what I propose is something very simple. Right now, the Department of State, HHS, and USAID have \$86 billion in unobligated balances—right now. There is absolutely no reason \$1 billion of that could not be moved to deal with Zika right now. It would be the exact same proposal that Senator MURRAY and Senator BLUNT have proposed but actually doing it with unobligated balances. There is absolutely no reason that wouldn't occur.

We know that \$500 million had already been moved over from Ebola funding. That would be \$1.6 billion moving over to help fight Zika.

The real issue to fighting Zika is three simple things. CDC is actually tracking the movements so we can stay attentive to it. The second thing is dealing with the mosquito population, which is aggressive spraying. The third thing is working on a vaccine. All three of those things we can do, and all three of those things have already begun. The research has already begun on the vaccine. The mosquito spraying has already begun, and working through the tracking and the movement of the disease has already started. The implication that nothing can start until this body acts is not true.

The administration, starting in January and February, came in and said: This is urgent. We need to be able to move funds, and we need to be able to have funds to do it.

Ironically, in January and February, they came and held hearings on that, but in March of this year—2 months ago—this same administration took half a billion dollars out of the economic support fund that Congress had allotted to them last December, which was earmarked especially for—get this—infectious diseases. So in March of this year, the administration took half a billion dollars out of the infectious diseases account for international infectious diseases and moved that over and gave it to the U.N. for the Green Climate Fund. Now they come to us, high and mighty, and say we need \$1 billion, when the one-half billion dollars we already allotted that can be used right now along with the one-half billion from Ebola, equaling \$1 billion, was already allotted by Congress—was already there—and could be in operation right now. They chose to reallocate to a different priority. So it disturbs me to hear the administration saying, "Why aren't you doing anything about this," when we did last year, and then they spent that money on green climate funds rather than spending it on Zika—what it was allotted for—infectious disease control.

So here is my issue. We need to do both. We need to deal with Zika, and we need to do it in a fiscally responsible way, and we can. I understand the term "emergency" means one simple thing, spend more—spend more and add more debt because it is an emergency.

I don't think Americans believe that with a \$4 trillion budget, we cannot cover \$1 billion from previous accounts. In fact, if we want to be specific, the three accounts the Blunt-Murray amendment puts money into—they are putting \$1.1 billion into a set of accounts. If we took those accounts alone, those accounts alone that they are adding \$1 billion to already have \$15 billion in unobligated balances in those accounts right now.

We can be efficient in what we do and still treat things seriously, and I think we should. I think it is fiscally responsible to not just say the Zika virus is

moving quickly so we need to add more debt to our children to respond to it. I think we can take care of our debt and take care of Zika.

For anyone who would say it is unheard of to be able to move funds for an emergency like this, may I remind you in 2009, this same Obama administration facing the H1N1 virus moving around the world, asked for permission to move unobligated balances out of some of these same accounts to deal with the H1N1 virus. We are just saying, if it is OK for the H1N1 virus, why is it suddenly not allowable now dealing with Zika? This is not about Zika anymore; this is about breaking the budget caps.

We need to be responsible in our spending and responsible in how we deal with Zika. Both things can be done.

With that, Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the pending amendment be set aside so that I may offer my amendment No. 3955 to the Blunt amendment No. 3900.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I like the Senator from Oklahoma. He is a great friend, and it pains me to reserve the right to object because I do consider him an excellent Senator.

However, the issue he raises in his unanimous consent request is to take the emergency funding of \$1.1 billion out of the appropriations bill and replace that emergency funding by raiding a number of funds that would cut medical research and public health in order to address the Zika virus. What I am talking about is raiding money from cancer research, children's immunizations, and the CDC's efforts to fight other infectious diseases that are already so important to the health and welfare of this country.

The Senator, whom I consider a friend and a good Senator, is from Oklahoma in the heart of the country. Oklahoma is covered with these two strains of mosquitoes, both of which carry the Zika virus. This one is the real culprit. This is the one that gets inside your house. This is the one that lurks in the dark corners of the house. This is the one that lays larvae in a rain-filled bottle cap that is sitting upside down.

I would say to the Senator from Oklahoma that this Senator has probably been bitten by more mosquitoes than any other Senator. There was a time when I was a kid that I was bitten so much that I was almost immune, but I do not want to be bitten by this critter carrying that Zika virus.

The truth is, if you have an earthquake in the State of Oklahoma, that is an emergency, and we are going to respond in kind. If the Senator from Texas has a hurricane coming into Galveston, that is an emergency, and we are going to respond. Likewise, this is an emergency. If you don't realize it

now in May, the summer months are coming.

I want to make sure everybody understands why we need to get this separate from the appropriations bill that the Senator from Washington, Mrs. MURRAY, is talking about. In order to get an appropriations bill, we have to get an agreement with the House. The House just passed a bill for \$622 million, and they are going to raid ObamaCare to pay for it. There is no way we are going to get an agreement that the President is going to sign going through that appropriations process. The summer is going to be long gone, and the aegypti is going to be biting all the more, sucking the blood of Americans, and therefore, while doing that, transmitting the virus into the bloodstream of Americans.

This Senator has already described the disastrous consequences for a pregnant woman. We ought to be petrified if they are in a county where either it is poor and they don't have the funds for mosquito control or it is a well-off county and it is not budgeted and they are not ready.

It pains me to have to clash with my friend, the Senator from Oklahoma. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, there is one clarification I would like to be able to make. This amendment I have proposed—and would still stand by—allows us to be able to continue what is going on with mosquito eradication right now. That doesn't stop. I would hate for anyone in this body to promise every American that if we give DC enough money, we will make sure they are never going to be bitten by a mosquito. I am not sure that is a promise we would ever want to make because we can't keep that promise, but the amendment I propose gives the administration the latitude to be able to select which accounts this money would come from. We are talking about \$86 billion of options on multiple accounts from the State Department, USAID for international aid, and also HHS. That is not for medical research and not for children getting immunizations. There is enough money in those accounts.

I will repeat back the same thing I said before. This administration transferred one-half billion dollars just 2 months ago from the infectious diseases account, noting, apparently, that we didn't need money in the infectious diseases account and moved that money to the Green Climate Fund. So for the administration to say it is more important that the U.N. get green climate funds than dealing with the Zika virus is a different set of priorities than where we are in this Congress and a different set of priorities than we put into place in December of last year.

This is an issue this administration already has the authority to deal with.

It doesn't have to come from cancer research. It can come from allocating accounts. But there is no reason to add debt to our children to also deal with mosquito eradication in the United States. We can do both, and we should do both.

I yield back.

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. ISAKSON. 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. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I rise to address the subject before the Senate with regard to the HUD proposed rule, the Lee amendment, and the amendment proposed by the Senator from Maine, Ms. COLLINS. I do so as one who has 35 years of experience in the housing business affected by the Civil Rights Act, affected by the 1968 Fair Housing Act, and one who has a good deal of working knowledge about what that accomplished. What that accomplished was the end of prejudice against African Americans in the South and ethnic minorities in the Northeast and around the country to ensure that everybody had an equal opportunity—underline the word “opportunity”—to have safe, affordable housing. That took place in 1968.

It has been a long time since 1968. Prejudice in America, although never eradicated, is almost gone. Housing access is almost universal, but there is one group of people in America who had very little access to housing because there is none available to them. We can identify them not by their name, not by their region but by their ZIP Codes. They are the neighborhoods of America that have contributed to the decline of many families and much hope and opportunity for individuals. Show me a school system or a school that is not performing, and I will show you rough neighborhoods. Show me an individual community that doesn't have the tax base it needs, and I will show you a community that doesn't have neighborhoods that are employed.

I want to bring to the attention of the Senate what I spoke on a year ago on this floor—a gentleman by the name of Thomas G. Cousins from Atlanta, GA, who founded Cousins Properties, the most successful developer in the history of Atlanta, GA; one of the leading developers in the United States of America and a man who gives back more than he ever takes.

He created the Cousins Foundation and set out in the early 1990s to find a way to address the problems of poverty, ignorance, and crime in inner-city neighborhoods. He bought something called East Lake Meadows. Some of you have watched the Fed-Ex Championship on TV and seen \$10 million prizes won by professional golfers. That is on a golf course that 25 years ago

had trees growing up in the fairway, dilapidated houses around it, and was described as Little Vietnam.

But it is an area that Tom Cousins changed by changing minds, by changing attitudes, and by talking about the things that could be done, rather than what could not be done. He knew that the best way to bring those people out of poverty was to provide them with a good education. So he came to the State Board of Education, which I chaired, and asked for a waiver to create the first charter school in the Atlanta, GA, public school system's history in East Lake.

He leased the school for \$1 a year for 25 years and then built for that neighborhood its own elementary school, called Drew Elementary.

Twenty-five years ago, Drew Elementary was the poorest testing school in the State of Georgia. This year, it is one of the top 10 in the State of Georgia out of 1,400. He changed the minds and attitudes of people—not their race. But he changed their minds and their attitudes about opportunity and about hope. He went into the community of dilapidated houses, crack houses, and meth houses, and bought those houses up and raised housing prices. He fixed them up and began to create a market for those houses.

The kids that formed gangs on the streets became caddies at the new country club named East Lake Country Club. They went to Georgia State University on Panther grants, granted to kids who are in need to get an education. Many of the kids in Atlanta, GA, who are getting MBAs today were educated in East Lake Meadows at Drew Elementary and had their job at the East Lake Country Club.

People do not associate golf courses, golf tournaments, and country clubs with areas of poverty and no housing, but East Lake is such a place. Because they built a blend of all types of housing—section 8 housing, rental housing, low- and moderate-income housing, midlevel housing, upper level housing, and shopping centers and the like—they took all of the things that the community did not have and then created a market for them to come.

They created a movement with Warren Buffett called Purpose Built Communities. Now, the HUD rule, which I have read, which is the issue of discussion today on the floor, is a rule that portends gathering more information to try and find ways we can end the lack of housing availability for certain Americans by bringing in data and trying to create new ways to do that.

Tom Cousins did it with private sector money. He did it in cooperation with the banking industry. He created an idea and a dream and an investment. He began to bring down the barriers of discrimination and a lack of hope and brought prosperity to a community that had not seen it—better educated kids, better developed communities, better schools, and the like.

I ask unanimous consent to have this article from the Wall Street Journal

about Thomas G. Cousins and Purpose Built Communities printed in the RECORD.

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

[From the Wall Street Journal, Sept. 13, 2013]

THOMAS COUSINS: THE ATLANTA MODEL FOR REVIVING POOR NEIGHBORHOODS
(By Thomas G. Cousins)

America's greatest untapped resource isn't hidden in the ground but is sitting in plain sight: the human capital trapped in poor neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. The people living where crime and incarceration are rampant represent trillions of dollars in potential economic activity. Investing in their well-being can be a social and economic game-changer, but only if done in a way that produces results.

For a half-century, charities, nonprofits and local and federal governments have poured billions of dollars into addressing the problems plaguing these Americans. But each issue tends to be treated separately—as if there is no connection between a safe environment and a child's ability to learn, or high-school dropout rates and crime. This scattershot method hasn't worked. A better approach is to invest comprehensively in small, geographically defined neighborhoods.

That's what our East Lake Foundation has discovered, focusing on one corner of southeast Atlanta. Fifteen years ago, East Lake Meadows, a public-housing project with 1,400 residents, was a terrifying place to live. Nine out of 10 residents had been victims of a crime. Today it is a safe community of working, taxpaying families whose children excel in the classroom.

How did this happen to a place that police officers once wouldn't go without backup? We targeted a single neighborhood in 1993 and worked with community and city leaders on every major issue at the same time: mixed-income housing, a cradle-to-college education program, job readiness, and health and wellness opportunities.

The results are stunning. Violent crime is down more than 90%. Crime overall is down 73%—a level 50% better than the rest of Atlanta. Employment among families on welfare has increased to 70% from 13% in 1995. (The other 30% are elderly, disabled or in job training.)

The income of these publicly assisted families has more than quadrupled. In the surrounding area, home values have risen at 3.8 times the city average (to over \$250,000 per home). A Wells Fargo bank, Publix grocery and Wal-Mart have moved in, and restaurants, shops and other services have returned.

The foundation started by focusing on housing. In 1996 and 1997, the Atlanta Housing Authority helped us secure temporary housing for the East Meadow occupants while AHA and the foundation rebuilt the place as Villages of East Lake. With city and federal government approval, we reserved half the units for families on welfare and the rest for those able to pay the market rate. This was key: A mixed-income community ensures that children are around role models—employed adults who take care of property and spend time with their children.

After negotiating with Atlanta Public Schools to secure the city's first public charter, we built Charles R. Drew School. The K-8 school, which opened in 2000, offered longer school days and an extended school year. It now serves 90% of the children in the East Lake neighborhood. Based on measures by the Georgia Department of Education, Drew is the top performing elementary school in the Atlanta school system.

The foundation also bought up surrounding residential and commercial properties, including the old East Lake golf course, once home to Grand Slam champion Bobby Jones. We restored the golf course, which created 179 jobs. Then came a smaller public course and a golf academy, where young people now learn the caddy trade and golf course agronomy. Today, East Lake Golf Club is the home of the annual PGA Tour Championship and final playoff for the FedExCup.

Thanks to private investors, such as Warren Buffett and Julian Robertson, we created Purpose Built Communities, which helps other neighborhoods adapt the East Lake model. The Meadows Community in Indianapolis and the Bayou District in New Orleans have achieved considerable gains by emulating the method in Atlanta.

Other organizations have slowly begun to adopt our approach. Habitat for Humanity, which once focused on putting up one house at a time, now partners with neighborhood associations, churches, business groups and the like to help lift up entire neighborhoods.

A better house by itself doesn't make children feel safe. East Lake's charter school alone doesn't make children eager to learn. But a decent place to live, a secure environment with adult role models, and a great school with specially trained teachers together produced change. Recently, a young woman whose life began in the old East Lake public housing project, where less than 30% of children graduated from high school, graduated summa cum laude from Georgia Tech. She's one of more than 300 Drew graduates since 2008 now heading to college.

On the national level, challenges like the ones we faced in southeast Atlanta are widespread and urgently need to be addressed. More than 25% of American children under age 3 live in poverty. Three million children drop out of school every year, rendering them ineligible for 90% of jobs. Only 59% of students graduate from high school in the 50 largest U.S. cities, and dropouts commit 75% of crimes.

These harsh realities make the way we choose to try to change them all the more important. Charities, foundations and government representatives are welcome to visit East Lake to check out this turnaround story. They won't need to bring backup.

Mr. ISAKSON. Now, the current amendment before us deals with the rule that is being promulgated by HUD dealing with the Civil Rights Act of 1968. But I want to caution everybody. It is not about discrimination because of prejudice. It is about discrimination because of lack of access. You read the testimony that went into a lot of the rule, and that is quite clear. There are a number of paralyzed veterans groups and handicapped groups that have sent letters against this amendment. Let me tell you why are they against it. They don't think anybody discriminates against them because they are handicapped. They just think they have no choice of housing because there is nothing that fits their wheelchairs or the walls in the bathroom are not reinforced or the kitchen countertops are too high.

What has happened in East Lake Meadows and in Atlanta, GA, where Purpose Built Communities set standards, is that 5 percent of all apartment buildings are built with convertible units. So up to 5 percent of the units can be converted to handicapped access: 36-inch doors, not 30-inch doors;

wainscoting on the side walls in the bathroom that allow reinforcement rods to be put in and for handles to be put on the walls; kitchen countertops that can be lowered by 8 inches so that somebody in a wheelchair can work their kitchen.

That is the type of access they want. Through the changes in code, in terms of construction code, and changes in attitude like Mr. Cousins did, we now have handicapped people that have access to affordable housing in Atlanta, GA, that is built to meet their specific needs. It is not discrimination of prejudice. It was discrimination of lack of opportunity.

The way I read the proposed rule, they are looking to take a chance to take advantage of things like Promise Built Communities and try and have private developers use Federal access to funds to create ways to create new housing that will have more accessibility and affordability for people in those type of situations.

Now, I understand that Senator COLLINS and Senator REED have an amendment they are going to offer, either as a side-by-side or as a part of the bill, which will clarify one important point: Nothing in here contains anything that portends to promulgate a rule or regulation or any zoning at a local land use authority by the Federal Government.

None of us ever wants the Federal Government to do that. But we have provided a lot of programs that have passed this Congress, this Senate, and this U.S. Government that promotes housing, such as section 8 housing, FHA housing, and VA housing. I can go on and on. We want to make sure that those finances that are available to finance purchases have houses to be purchased that meet the needs of all Americans, giving them a public accommodation and access that some of them never had before.

So with the amendment adopted by Senator COLLINS, I think you are protected against any nefarious activity that could ever be taken on by HUD, and you are doing a good thing for the State, a good thing for the United States, and a good thing for the Senate. I commend Senators REED and COLLINS on what they are doing.

I rise in support of the Collins-Reed amendment, and I will vote for it on the floor.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I just want to thank my friend and colleague from Georgia for his extremely eloquent and persuasive presentation. The example he gave us of the development in Georgia, done by Mr. Cousins, is precisely what the HUD rule is intended to promote. That is why it is called affirmatively advancing fair housing, affirmatively furthering fair housing.

With the amendment that Senator JACK REED, THAD COCHRAN, and I are going to be offering, we will make absolutely clear that it is not HUD's role

to dictate or interfere with local zoning ordinances. But what we should embrace in this country is the goals of the 1968 Fair Housing Act. The Senator from Georgia, who knows more about housing than any Member of this Senate, has stated very clearly and very eloquently in the example that he has given us what the goals are of the 1968 Fair Housing Act and the regulation that was issued by HUD last year.

Again, I would note that the regulation issued last year came from a GAO report issued in 2010 that found that HUD was not doing a particularly good job in this area. So it was not something that was devised by some out-of-touch bureaucrat. It was directly the result of the GAO report. The kind of mixed development, which has transformed neighborhoods in Atlanta and throughout this country and given hope and opportunity to those who may feel they are in the shadows of society, is exactly the goal of this regulation and of that famous civil rights era law, the 1968 Fair Housing Act.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. RUBIO. 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. RUBIO. Mr. President, I wish to talk about housing issues contained in the bill we are debating, and I want to talk specifically about a project in Florida that we became aware of in October. It is named Eureka Gardens. It is a low-income, affordable housing project that uses Section 8 funds to house people of lower income, as you are all aware of that program. It is run and owned by an organization called Global Ministries Foundation. It is run by a reverend, Richard Hamlet. It is organized as a 501(c)(3), the organization that owns this building. Mr. Hamlet, Reverend Hamlet, is the head of the organization.

If you look at the Web site for Global Ministries, there is a link that says: "What We Do." If you go to that section of the Global Ministries Foundation Web site, this is what it says they do: "Providing affordable housing across the United States and ministering to the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of our residents." That is what they state as their business purpose. I imagine that is what they needed to state because of their 501(c)(3) not-for-profit status. However, we have a quote from Reverend Hamlet, who has said that his involvement in housing is purely business-related. He said:

This is a business. This isn't a church mission. These are business corporations that we set up, but we're no different from a real estate investment trust or a private equity group.

That is how he described his 501(c)(3), not-for-profit Global Ministries Foundation.

Global Ministries has over 40 properties in multiple States—Alabama, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, North Carolina, New York, Tennessee, and Georgia. In all of these States, in all of these properties, they have over 5,000 units that qualify as assisted. In 19 locations across Florida, they have over 2,000 assisted units. This particular project in Jacksonville, FL, Eureka Gardens, has 396 assisted units.

This is the problem we found with some of these properties. In Eureka Gardens, in the last year, the property was found to be in horrifying condition. I have spoken of it on the floor before. I am talking about people living in a place where there was mold on the walls, where the appliances were 15 years old, where the apartments hadn't been painted in 13 years, where windows didn't open, where staircases were literally falling down, and where the city had to come in, evacuate people, and condemn the property.

Those were the conditions in Eureka Gardens. We got involved last October to get those remedied. So there was the thinking, well, maybe this is just one property. Maybe Global Ministries only has one property that is run this way but generally they are a good actor.

This is what we found: They have two properties—Warren and Tulane Apartments in Memphis, TN—that have such poor living companies as well that HUD pulled their Federal funding from the housing.

In Atlanta, we found that their Forest Cove property has been plagued by rodents and sewage. This is what news crews reported about their property in Atlanta. It said "building, siding, and ceiling tiles peeling from many of the buildings. . . . Garbage and stagnant green water were feet from playing children."

At Forest Cove, this is what a tenant said to news reporters:

I'm homeless right now. I moved out to be homeless.

Because the conditions were so bad, the guy moved out of the property. In other words, he would rather be homeless than live in a Global Ministries Foundation property.

So we have two properties in Memphis, TN, we have a property in Atlanta, and then there is another property in Jacksonville that they own. The property is called Washington Heights. It also has been noted for violation. HUD's most recent review resulted in the property barely passing Federal inspections. And I will have more to say about Federal inspections in a moment.

At the Goodwill Village property in Memphis, one resident said that he thought the issue was snakes on the property—snakes on the property. He thought they were being caused because they were coming to "eat the rats."

At Goodwill Village, the same property, a resident had an issue with a gas leak. The resident's home had the sink torn out, her stove and hot water disconnected, and a hole put into her wall.

Two months after all of that, no one had come by to fix it.

In Orlando, at the Windsor Cove Apartments owned by the Global Ministries Foundation, reporters saw holes in the walls where roaches and rodents came into the apartment. The same woman has a gap between her bathtub and the wall that lets water leak into the apartment below.

After issues with his properties were exposed, here is what Reverend Hamlet said: “No one should have to live under these conditions.”

They are your properties. It is not just one property; there are multiple properties across multiple States. I want to focus specifically on the one I visited last week in Jacksonville. It was an amazing experience. Forty-eight hours before we announce we are coming, nothing—literally nothing—is happening at this property. When we announce we are coming to visit the property, suddenly a bunch of contractors show up. They put up a banner welcoming the residents to all the great stuff they do there. Suddenly work crews are walking all over, fixing the place up. All of a sudden, because we are coming to visit, all these work crews mysteriously show up.

Eureka Gardens’s problems have been going on for a long time, but they only became known in October of last year when a local television station and other local media began to highlight them.

My Jacksonville office staff toured Eureka Gardens in early 2015 and in October of 2015. I want to report what they found in that one building. As I said, we have now had reports about other buildings with similar conditions run by this Global Ministries 501(c)(3), but I want to share what my staff found when they visited Eureka Gardens. They saw crumbling stairs disguised with duct tape and covered with apparent black mold. When I am talking about the stairs, I mean the stairs that connect the first floor of the building with the second floor of the building, these metal stairs. They would just put duct tape over the areas where the stairs and the wall were cracking and almost falling. They just put duct tape on it. There was mold on these stairs; they spray-painted over it. My staff found faulty electrical wiring. Do you know what they did with the faulty electrical wiring? They covered it up with a garbage bag so no one could see it. They could smell the natural gas odor being sucked from an outdoor piping system into the air-conditioning units of residents, and they found all sorts of other health and safety issues.

At Eureka Gardens, when residents were asked about housing, one resident said, “Dogs live better than this.” In fact, there was a 4-year-old living in Eureka Gardens who was suffering from lead poisoning, which her mother has a right to believe she got in her Eureka Gardens apartment—an apartment, by the way, paid for with your

taxpayer money. Section 8 housing is Federal taxpayer money going into the hands of these slumlords, and a child now has lead poisoning because of it.

In December of last year, HUD declared Eureka Gardens to be in default of the contract, and it set a February 24, 2016, deadline to meet requirements. In February, Eureka Gardens passed this inspection, but by March HUD had written to Eureka Gardens saying the Department “does not believe the property would currently pass another REAC inspection.”

Last Friday I visited Eureka Gardens. I saw, for example, an apartment where the window did not open. I saw an apartment where the window did not open. The window had been cracked, and do you know how they fixed it? Somebody came and put a glob of glue where the window connects next to the pane, and if you tried to open the window, it wouldn’t go up. That means if there was a fire in that house, the person sleeping in that room would not be able to get out of that window unless they break it. I saw that with my own eyes last week when I was there. I saw an apartment that hadn’t been painted in 13 years. I saw a stove where the knobs were unrecognizable because they were covered with glue, basically, and grime. I saw a refrigerator that looked like it was from North Korea. It had to be 15 years old. There was all sorts of rust on the side and they just spray-painted over the rust.

As I said earlier, 48 hours before I visited, Global Ministries started to fix some of these cosmetic issues. By the way, that included putting up a piece of wood with exposed nails and calling it a door. This apartment has two exits—in the front and in the back. This lady gets home from work and she opens her back door. They have boarded up the door, and there are nails sticking through the wood. She has little children. The nails were the kind that if you ran into that door because you didn’t know it was there, you would get a nail to the face, to the heart, to the gut.

So you would ask yourself, all right, you have these owners of all these units and they are getting this Federal money under this HUD contract. Where does all the money go? What are they doing with all this money they make? Well, you can look at their 990 tax forms, which are available for all 501(c)(3) organizations.

Let me tell you about the 2014 tax year, which is the most recent one that is available. In the year 2014, the Reverend Richard Hamlet paid himself \$495,000 plus \$40,000 in nontaxable benefits. Also in 2014, the Reverend Hamlet’s family members were paid an additional \$218,000.

By the way, he had previously failed to disclose his family members’ compensation on tax forms, which is in violation of IRS rules that require CEOs to disclose the compensation of all family members who work for an organization.

The IRS reports also show that between 2011 and 2013, Global Ministries Foundation—the landlord that owns all of these units in all of these buildings that your taxpayer money is paying for—shifted \$9 million away from its low-income housing not-for-profit to its religious affiliate. There is no one here who is a more strident proponent of private and public partnerships, of faith-based initiatives, but you have these building that are crumbling. You have these people living in these deplorable conditions. In addition to paying himself half a million dollars and his family another \$218,000, they took \$9 million, and instead of using it to fix these units, they transferred it to the other entity they had for religious purposes.

They don’t seem to want to spend the money—including the taxpayer money—on making repairs, on making sure places like Eureka Gardens are liveable. Let me tell what you they do spend their money on. They spend their money on public relations specialists, because last week when I visited Eureka Gardens, they had a public relations firm on the premises countering me with the media, saying things like: Oh, well, where has RUBIO been all this time? Well, this became available in October, and since October we have been involved in it.

So they have the money to hire a law firm. They have the money to hire a lobbying firm. They have the money to hire a public relations firm. They have the money to transfer \$9 million from the not-for-profit sector into their religious uses. They have the money to pay themselves half a million dollars per year, plus \$40,000 in nontaxable benefits, plus \$200,000 for family members, but they don’t have the money to fix these units—and not just in Florida but all across this country.

Let me tell you what this behavior is. Let me tell you what Global Ministries Foundation is. It is a slumlord. They are slumlords. There are people who are living in these deplorable conditions while your taxpayer money is going into their bank account, and they are laughing at us.

By the way, the other day, this minister—he has now put these properties up for sale. He told the press: This is such a profitable business. We have so many bidders who want these properties.

Well, No. 1, if it is such a profitable business, why are you organized as a 501(c)(3)? And No. 2, where is all the money? Where are all the profits? Why aren’t they being invested?

I am all in favor of faith-based organizations being involved in the public and civic life of this country, but as an organization that was organized on the principles of caring for others, this is not caring for people. This, my friends, is the stealing of American taxpayer money, subjecting people to slum-like conditions, pocketing the money, living off the money, and transferring the money.

For the life of me, I don't know how they passed any inspections. I am not a building inspector. You don't have to be one to visit this building and know there is no inspection that building should ever pass.

I would just say that this is the most outrageous behavior I have seen in public housing, and now I am hearing that the same conditions exist in Orlando and in other buildings in Jacksonville. We know they exist in Memphis. In fact, they just lost their HUD contract in Memphis. A judge just issued a ruling against them yesterday on another issue in Memphis, TN.

As a result of these conditions and other issues, I have filed four amendments I wish to briefly talk about. The first is amendment No. 3918, which passed. What it does is it shortens the required response time for contract violations from 30 days to 15 days. Within the 30 days that they found that gas leak at Eureka Gardens, four people at Eureka Gardens were hospitalized due to gas leaks. So I am glad shortening the timeframe will be a part of it.

Another amendment we passed is one that basically asks HUD to determine the state of the assessments. Even the Secretary himself has told me it is time to revisit these assessments. If you look at this property, there is no way it should have ever passed any inspections. We need to fix the inspection process in HUD because there is no reason a property like this should pass any inspection.

The third amendment I filed, and that I hope we can pass, would give State and local governments more say when HUD renews contracts for owners who have violated previous contracts. In essence, the amendment would allow the Secretary to refuse to withdraw a notice of default if the Governor of the requisite State petitions HUD to do that.

Currently, the only trigger for the Secretary to withdraw a notice is a REAC score of 60 or above. If this amendment became law, if the property passed the inspection but the Governor of the State in which the property is located requests the Secretary to overturn the result, the Secretary would have the power to do so.

This impacts Eureka Gardens and these other places because flawed inspections led HUD to recertify properties that are not up to standard. The Jacksonville City Council has been engaged and Mayor Curry of Jacksonville is supporting this amendment. It would grant them the ability to seek the Governor's support in having a say over the properties.

The last amendment I filed is Rubio amendment No. 3986, and it is to make temporary relocation assistance available for residents in situations such as those I have just described. This amendment would make tenant protection vouchers available for tenants living in units where the owner has been declared in default of a HUD Housing

Assistance Payments contract due to physical deficiencies, allowing the Secretary to consider granting tenant relocation vouchers sooner in the process.

The lack of temporary relocation assistance has kept these tenants trapped in Eureka Gardens. The inability to temporarily relocate resulted in tenants being hospitalized because of gas leaks and other difficult conditions. For example, a man had to sleep in his bathtub for a week at Eureka Gardens, and tenants could not cook because the heat was shut off for days at a time.

One of the things we hear from HUD is: Well, we can take away the contract, but then what happens to all these people? We don't want to do that, and slumlords like Reverend Hamlet and his group know they can get away with this as a result.

There is probably more to be done. I said publicly that I think the Justice Department should look into these people. I think the Justice Department should look into places such as this. I think the IRS should examine their tax status. I think people like this should never again be allowed to have a single HUD contract anywhere in America. This is unacceptable, and it is happening right under our noses.

Today it is Eureka Gardens, but I mentioned all those other States. In fact, I encourage my colleagues who live in the States of Alabama, Indiana, Louisiana, North Carolina, New York, and Georgia to look into the properties that Global Ministries Foundation operates in your States. If the trends continue, if the trends hold up, then I almost guarantee you are going to find slumlike conditions in your State the way they were found in my State and the way they were found in Tennessee.

I hope I can earn my colleagues' support in bringing these reforms as a part of the bill before us today.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

OVERTIME PAY

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I believe that real long-term economic growth is built from the middle out, not from the top down, and our government and our economy and our workplaces should work for all of our families, not just the wealthiest few.

Across the country today, millions of workers are working harder than ever without basic overtime protection. That is why I am very proud to come to the floor today to express my strong support for the new overtime rule to help millions of workers and families in our country.

Back in 1938, Congress recognized the need for overtime pay. Without overtime protection, corporations were able to exploit workers' time to increase

their profits. So the Fair Labor Standards Act set up a standard 40-hour workweek. By law, when workers put in more than 40 hours, their employers had to compensate them fairly with time-and-a-half pay. But those protections have eroded over the past several decades.

In today's economy, many Americans feel as if they are working more and more for less and less pay, and in many cases, they are. Right now, if a salaried worker earns just a little more than \$23,000 a year, he or she is not guaranteed time-and-a-half pay. That salary threshold is much too low. In fact, it is less than the poverty level for a family of four.

Workers should not have to earn poverty wages to get guaranteed overtime protection. It is clear that overtime rules in this country are severely out of date. Consider this: Back in the mid-1970s, 62 percent of salaried workers had guaranteed overtime pay. Today, just 7 percent of salaried workers have that protection. Big corporations use these outdated overtime rules to their advantage. They force their employees to work overtime without paying them the fair time-and-a-half pay. That might be good for a big corporation's profit, but it is a detriment to a working family's economic security.

Today, the Department of Labor has issued a final rule to raise the salary threshold from about \$23,000 to just over \$47,000 a year. That will restore protections for millions of Americans, and it is especially important, by the way, for a parent. Think about what it would mean for a working mom, who right now works overtime and doesn't get paid for it. By restoring this basic worker protection, she could finally work a 40-hour week and spend more time with her kids or, if her employer asks her to work more than 40 hours a week, she would have more money in her pocket to boost her family's economic security.

That is why this is so important for our struggling middle class. When workers put in more than 40 hours a week on the job, they should be paid fairly for it. That is the bottom line.

I have heard from some of my Republican colleagues who don't want to update these overtime rules. If you listen closely, it sounds as though they are trying to argue that businesses in this country can't operate unless they are able to exploit workers' time and refuse them overtime pay.

Well, Democrats fundamentally disagree. In fact, when workers have economic security, when they are able to make ends meet and succeed, businesses succeed, our economy succeeds. That virtuous cycle is part of what makes America great.

If Republicans want to take away these basic worker protections, they will have to answer to millions of hard-working Americans putting in overtime without receiving a dime of extra pay. They can try, but I know that I and many others are going to be right

here fighting back for the workers and families we represent—families like Meryle's from Bellingham, WA. She said that early in her career she worked low-wage jobs and oftentimes her overtime hours went unpaid.

When Meryle heard about the Obama administration updating overtime protections, she wrote in to comment on that new rule. She said those unpaid overtime hours hurt her pocketbook, but she said she lost more than money. She was working overtime without being paid fairly for it on top of missing out on important time with her daughter.

Boosting wages and expanding economic stability and security is good for our families, and it is good for our economy. By the way, that is exactly what we should be focused on here in Congress to help build our economy from the middle out, not the top down.

For workers who want fair pay for a day's work, for the parents—like Meryle—who have sacrificed family time for overtime and not seen a dime in extra pay, for families who are looking for some much needed economic security, I urge all of my colleagues to support restoring these important overtime protections.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

(The remarks of Mrs. GILLIBRAND and Mr. GRASSLEY pertaining to the introduction of S. 2944 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I wish to revisit my discussion with Senator DURBIN yesterday regarding my amendment No. 3925 to the Department of Veterans Affairs funding bill.

As I made clear yesterday, this is a commonsense amendment protecting constitutional rights. It is designed to make every effort to ensure that the Second Amendment rights of veterans are protected under the law. Yet the Democrats have objected. Because of that, our veterans will continue to not be protected by their Second Amendment constitutional rights.

Let me make myself very clear. Senator DURBIN said my amendment "doesn't solve the problem." "Doesn't solve the problem" are his words. Well, the Department of Veterans Affairs is reporting names to the Department of Justice which are then placed on the national gun ban list, and the VA is doing so merely when a veteran is appointed a fiduciary—which does not mean he or she is dangerous. That is the problem.

As I explained yesterday, my amendment requires the VA to first determine that a veteran is a danger to self or others before reporting names. That simply solves the problem.

Senator DURBIN also said that under my amendment, "mental health determinations would no longer count as prohibiting gun possession." As I stat-

ed yesterday, I do not want people who are known to be dangerous to own and possess firearms. My amendment makes that very clear.

Further, given that plain language, it is obvious that under my amendment, mental health determinations do count because some mental health problems equate to a very dangerous condition. Again, my amendment is centered on forcing the Federal Government to determine whether a veteran is a danger to self or others before revoking his or her constitutional rights to own a firearm.

Senator DURBIN said that "tens of thousands of names currently in the NICS system"—the gun ban list—"would likely need to be purged, meaning these people could go out and buy guns." Now, that is not so. If anything, my amendment would require the Federal Government to look over the VA records sent to the gun ban list and verify that those persons on it are dangerous to themselves or others.

That doesn't have to be purging. Rather, the Federal Government would now have the burden of proving a veteran should not be able to exercise his or her fundamental Second Amendment rights. Since there is no purging, but rather dangerous persons will be identified via a constitutional process, it is not accurate to say that "these people could go out and buy guns." Therefore, Senator DURBIN has not studied my amendment and its outcome. Really, the government should always provide constitutional due process before infringing on a fundamental constitutional right.

Senator DURBIN mentioned 174,000 names were supplied by the VA to the gun ban list and about 15,000 of them had serious mental illnesses. Actually, as of December 2015, the VA has supplied 260,381 names out of the 263,492 in the mental defective category. That happens to be 98.8 percent of the total number of people on the mental defective list that are there because of the VA and not because it has been determined their constitutional rights should be taken away.

Assuming Senator DURBIN is correct about the 15,000 who had a serious mental illness, that leaves about 245,000 who did not. Those are 245,000 people whose constitutional rights are being restricted without due process for no good reason. Not a single individual was determined to be dangerous before the VA submitted their name to this list so their constitutional rights could be violated.

My amendment, and my remarks last night, make clear that if a person is dangerous, they will not be able to possess a firearm. Therefore, Senator DURBIN's concern that my amendment will allow dangerous people to buy firearms is simply inaccurate.

Importantly, Senator DURBIN even admitted that not all the names reported to the VA are dangerous. Senator DURBIN said: "I do not dispute what the Senator from Iowa suggested,

that some of these veterans may be suffering from a mental illness not serious enough to disqualify them from owning a firearm, but certainly many of them do."

Then, Senator DURBIN said: "Let me just concede at the outset that reporting 174,000 names goes too far, but eliminating 174,000 names goes too far." I am glad that Senator DURBIN acknowledged that many of the names on the gun ban list supplied by the VA do not pose a danger and should be removed.

But again, my amendment is not about purging names from the list. I would be happy to take him up on his offer to work with him on that problem. Surely, we can agree that, going forward, the VA should start affording due process to veterans before they are stripped of their Second Amendment rights. If you really want a solution to this problem, stop objecting to this amendment.

As I stated yesterday, my amendment does three things. First, it makes the "danger to self or others" standard applicable to the VA. We all agree that dangerous persons must not own or possess firearms. Second, it shifts the burden of proof from the veteran and back to the Government where it belongs. Third, it fixes the constitutional due process issues by removing the hearing from the VA to the judicial system.

The last thing I will note is something on which I wholeheartedly agree with Senator DURBIN. Yesterday, he said: "We need to find a reasonable way to identify those suffering from serious mental illness who would be a danger to themselves, their families or others, and to sort out those that don't fit in that category."

As I have made clear, my amendment does exactly that. Why, then, are the Democrats refusing to fix this problem if they admit the problem exists? This is an outrage. We all know that veterans are being treated unfairly. My amendment fixes the problem, yet Democrats object.

What is dangerous is that Democrats are allowing veterans to be subjected to a process that casts their Second Amendment rights aside. All of this smells of hypocrisy. For months, the Democrats and their allies have been attacking me and the Republicans for not voting on the Supreme Court nominee. But the Democrats will not even allow a simple vote on protecting veterans' constitutional rights.

Can you imagine the chaos that would reign over this Chamber again if the Democrats were to take control over the Senate? I will continue to stand firm in defense of our veteran population. I will continue to fight to protect their constitutional rights from offensive and oppressive government outreach.

Our veterans are a special group. They give life and limb for our safety so that we can sleep in peace at night.

The iron fist of government must submit to the constitutional rights of veterans, and those constitutional rights have been taken away by the VA willy-nilly just because somebody needs a fiduciary—nothing to do with the competence of that veteran to not be able to buy a gun.

I yield the floor.

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

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to speak about amendment No. 4012. I want to thank my cosponsors—Senators SESSIONS, VITTER, COTTON, and INHOFE. This amendment addresses a very serious public safety threat; that is, the threat posed by sanctuary cities. This is a problem that is not a theoretical abstraction. It is a problem that some Americans know all too well—one father, in particular.

On July 1, 2015, Jim Steinle was walking arm in arm with his daughter Kate on a pier in San Francisco. A gunman opened fire and hit Kate. Within moments, she died in her father's arms. Her last words were: "Help me, Dad."

What is maddening about this is that the shooter should never have been on the pier in the first place. He was an illegal immigrant. He was here illegally. He had been convicted of seven felonies, and he had been deported five times. But it gets worse.

Just 3 months prior to his shooting and killing Kate Steinle, the San Francisco police had him in custody. Federal immigration officials knew that the San Francisco police had him in custody. They knew he was here illegally, in violation of multiple deportations—a violent criminal convicted on multiple occasions. They said: Hold him until we get somebody there to pick him up and deport him. But the police refused to hold him. Instead, they released the shooter into the public.

Why did they do that? Because San Francisco is a sanctuary city. That means that they are a city that specifically—and by law, within the city—forbids their police from cooperating with Federal immigration officials. Even when the police wants to cooperate, it is against the law in the city to do so.

The local police and President Obama's administration agree that, with respect to a dangerous person, the Federal and local law enforcement authorities ought to cooperate, but the local politicians—in San Francisco, in this case—have overridden that judgment. Instead, the police, who had every opportunity to prevent this man from being on the pier that night, released him, and he went on to kill Kate Steinle.

As a father of three young children, I can't even imagine the pain that family has gone through. Sadly, the Steinles are not alone. According to the Department of Homeland Security—our current administration's Department of Homeland Security—during an 8-month period that they exam-

ined last year alone, sanctuary city jurisdictions released over 8,000 illegal immigrants, and 1,800 of them were later arrested for criminal acts. It included two cities that released individuals who had been arrested for child sex abuse. In both cases, the individuals released sexually assaulted other children again.

In the wake of these tragedies, you would think that elected officials across America would end this practice of having these dangerous sanctuary city policies. Sadly, that is not the case.

In the biggest city in my State, Philadelphia, they have taken the opposite approach. In fact, they imposed one of the most extreme versions of sanctuary cities anywhere in America. Two weeks ago, President Obama's Secretary of Homeland Security visited Philadelphia for the specific purpose of trying to persuade the city government to make a tiny exception to their sanctuary city policy. He wanted to change the policy so that the Philadelphia police would be able to notify Federal immigration officials if they are about to release from their custody a person who has been convicted of a violent felony or convicted of a crime involving a gang or is a suspected terrorist. The mayor of Philadelphia refused.

Even under those circumstances, the police of Philadelphia are forbidden from cooperating and sharing the information with Federal immigration officials.

What are the kinds of consequences for this? Consider the case of Alberto Suarez. In 2010, Alberto Suarez kidnapped and raped a girl from Montgomery County, which is just outside of Philadelphia. He bragged to the girl that the police would never be able to catch him because he is here illegally. Five months later, he kidnapped a 22-year-old woman from a Philadelphia bus stop, and he raped her. He has been apprehended, he has plead guilty, and he is awaiting sentencing. But some day, he will be released. Under the current Philadelphia city policy of being a sanctuary city, the police cannot inform Federal immigration officials when they are releasing him. This is ridiculous.

Imagine that the Philadelphia police have in their custody an illegal immigrant whom the FBI suspects of plotting a terrorist attack. The Department of Homeland Security might very reasonably say to the police: Hold on to him until we can get an agent down there to take him into custody and ask him some questions because we suspect that he is involved with a terrorist plot. The Philadelphia police's response—not by their choice but by virtue of Philadelphia's being a sanctuary city—to the Federal official is this: Could you come back again after he has actually committed the terrorist attack and been convicted of it, and then we will see if we can help you?

This makes no sense at all. This is not partisan. This policy has been

criticized by the former Philadelphia mayor, former Pennsylvania Governor, and Democrat Ed Rendell. It has been criticized by President Obama's Secretary of Homeland Security and Pennsylvania law enforcement officials across the political spectrum.

Let me be very, very clear. This is not principally about immigration. It is not about immigration at all. It is about violent and dangerous criminals. Everybody knows—I certainly know—that the vast majority of immigrants are never going to commit a violent crime. It isn't about them. It is about the fact that if you have any significant population—and, certainly, 11 million people are here illegally—some subset of that population will be violent criminals. We know that.

I have an amendment. It is modeled on a bill that the Senate voted on last October. It was supported by a bipartisan majority of Senators in that vote. It deals with this problem. First of all, there is an understandable reason why some communities have become sanctuary communities, and that is because a court decision has created a legal liability for the cities if they, at the request of the Department of Homeland Security, detain someone who later turns out to have been the wrong person. That legal liability has scared a number of communities. It is understandable.

This amendment changes that. It makes it clear that when the local police are in compliance with a Department of Homeland Security detainer request, the local police have the same authority as the Department of Homeland Security. If that person has been identified wrongly, then the liability still exists. If the person's civil rights have been violated, they can sue. But the liability is with the Department of Homeland Security, as it should be, and not against local law enforcement officials who are temporarily acting on behalf of the Department of Homeland Security.

Having corrected that problem, if this amendment passes, what we say is this: If you want to, nevertheless, be a sanctuary city and refuse to allow the local police to cooperate with Federal immigration officials, then we are going to withhold community development block grant funds from such a community. As you know, these are the funds that have great discretion in the hands of local elected officials to spend on various projects.

The fact is that sanctuary cities impose a very real cost—a real cost for the Federal Government. The most important cost, by far, is the danger to society that it imposes. It is entirely reasonable for the Federal Government to withhold some of these grants in the event that a city chooses to inflict that cost on the rest of us.

This legislation is endorsed by the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, the National Sheriffs' Association, the National Association of Police Organizations, and the International Union of Police Associations,

which is a division of the AFL-CIO. It is a simple, commonsense amendment, and it stands for the simple principle that the safety of the American people matters, and the life of Kate Steinle matters.

Right up front, I want to debunk some of the misinformation that is occasionally promulgated about this amendment. One is the idea that it would discourage people from coming forward and reporting crimes or reporting that they witnessed a crime or that they were a victim of crime, and that, therefore, it is a bad idea. The fact is that our legislation has been drafted in such a way that if a local community has a law that says that local law enforcement shall not inquire about the immigration status of a crime victim or witness, according to our legislation, that doesn't make you a sanctuary city. Any city would still be free to offer that protection to people so that they would not have to fear deportation for disclosing a crime.

The fact is that this amendment is germane, and it was timely filed. It satisfies all of the relevant rules. This is the right time, and this is the legislation to consider this. It is time to stop with this politically correct nonsense and being so worried that we can't offend anyone that we are going to risk the safety of our communities.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the pending amendment be set aside so I may offer my amendment No. 4012.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I reserve my right to object. The Senator from Pennsylvania has very thoughtfully pointed to significant issues with respect to immigration law and public safety, but I believe the remedy of cutting off CDBG funding is not the appropriate response to these very serious problems. Indeed, CDBG funding is available throughout the Nation to large communities and small communities, and in many cases it provides support for public safety projects, such as infrastructure that protects people, and on and on and on.

With all due respect to the Senator from Pennsylvania, I object to making the amendment pending at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, with all due respect to my friend and colleague from Rhode Island, I just have to say that this is exactly what Americans are so fed up with. There is a real problem out there with public safety, and they know it. This is a ridiculous and indefensible policy, but I am willing to have a debate about it. I did not ask for unanimous consent to have my amendment adopted. I asked unanimous consent to have it debated and have a vote. If a majority of Senators disagrees with me, then I don't know why they can't come down here and cast a

vote and let us know. It is germane, it is in order, and it complies with all the rules.

The status quo means dangerous criminals are being released onto our streets. That is a fact.

I will tell you what is going on here. We have colleagues who are afraid to cast a vote. They are afraid of having to make a choice. They are afraid that if they vote with me to put pressure on cities to end sanctuary cities, it will offend some people, and they don't want to do that. If they vote against it, they know they are endangering their own constituents, and they don't want their constituents to know that. Rather than standing up and making a decision, what do they do? They say: Let's not allow the debate; let's not allow the amendment. This is exactly what the American people are so fed up with.

I am not giving up on this. This is a very important issue. We have a responsibility to be stewards of the money that we give these cities. I think the vast majority of Pennsylvanians, the people whom I represent, want me to be a steward who is looking after their safety, and the status quo doesn't do that. This amendment would solve a very important problem. It is outrageous that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are afraid to have this debate, afraid to go on record, and afraid to let their constituents know whether they support sanctuary cities or not. We are not finished with this issue.

I yield the floor.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on Tuesday, Senator GRASSLEY came to the floor advocating for an amendment. His amendment dealt with access to guns for those who have been determined by the Department of Veterans Affairs to be mentally incompetent due to injury or disease.

Senator GRASSLEY's amendment was 10 lines long. It would simply cut off funds for the VA to "treat" any person who the VA has determined to be mentally incompetent under its current administrative process as a prohibited gun purchaser under Federal firearms laws.

On behalf of myself and other Senators, I objected to this amendment. I pointed out that Senator GRASSLEY's amendment would likely require purging the NICS background check database of thousands of records of people who have already been diagnosed with serious mental illness and referred to NICS by the VA.

As Senator GRASSLEY no doubt knows, current law requires a Federal agency that submits a record to NICS to notify the Attorney General if the basis upon which the record was submitted to NICS no longer applies. The Attorney General is then obligated to remove the record from NICS within thirty days.

If the Grassley amendment were to pass and prohibit the VA from continuing to "treat" a mentally incompetent person as a prohibited gun pur-

chaser, then it casts into doubt the basis upon which tens of thousands of NICS mental health records were submitted.

So Senator GRASSLEY's amendment would likely purge those records from NICS. Tens of thousands of people with serious mental illnesses would become able to buy guns.

Senator GRASSLEY came to the floor earlier this afternoon to criticize my objection. He made two main points that I want to respond to.

First, he said that Democrats were being hypocritical for not allowing a vote on this issue.

Senator GRASSLEY must have only started paying attention to this issue recently. I can remember at least three votes we have had on the Senate floor on this issue.

In April 2013, when the Senate was under Democratic control, an amendment offered by Senator BURR that was very similar to Senator GRASSLEY's amendment was voted upon and failed to pass.

An alternative and more sensible proposal for addressing the issue of VA referrals to the NICS database was included in the Manchin-Toomey legislation which the Senate voted upon in April 2013 and again last December.

In contrast to the Burr and Grassley amendments, which specified no process for reviewing the thousands of VA mental health referrals that have already been made to NICS, the Manchin-Toomey amendment set up a notification, review, and appeal process. It wasn't perfect, but it was very credible process, and I voted for it.

That is how we should be approaching this issue, with thoughtful authorizing legislation, not 10-line appropriations riders that are airdropped in on the Senate floor.

Second, Senator GRASSLEY said that the VA has been depriving veterans of their constitutional rights willy-nilly.

I would urge Senator GRASSLEY to look at the actual process the VA undertakes.

In connection with an award of veterans benefits, the VA formally may determine as "mentally incompetent" a person who "because of injury or disease lacks the mental capacity to contract or to manage his or her own affairs, including disbursement of funds without limitation."

The types of mental disorders that qualify as "injury or disease" for this purpose are set forth in 38 C.F.R. 4.130 and include diseases such as schizophrenia, dementia, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and bipolar disorders, among others. Such illness or disease must be responsible for a person's inability to manage his or her own affairs for a VA determination of incompetency.

Like all VA benefit determinations, incompetency determinations are governed by clearly defined procedures to ensure due process.

Where the VA becomes aware that a veteran may be unable to manage his

or her affairs, an incompetency rating is proposed and the individual in question is provided with notice and the opportunity to submit evidence and appear before a VA hearing officer. Determinations are based on all evidence of record. Unless the medical evidence is clear, convincing, and leaves no doubt as to the person's incompetency, no determination is made. Reasonable doubt is resolved in favor of competency.

All VA determinations of incompetency may be appealed within the VA's administrative appeals process, which includes the opportunity to seek review by the Board of Veterans' Appeals. Final BVA decisions may be appealed to the independent United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

Here is the bottom line: All of us respect our veterans, but we know that gun access by those with serious mental illness increases the risk of suicide and violence, and the VA has identified tens of thousands of people with serious mental illness.

We can work on a reasonable process, like the Manchin-Toomey legislation proposed, to make sure that the VA is not submitting mental health records inappropriately, but simply invalidating all the records that the VA has supplied to the background check database is irresponsible and dangerous.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

COMPREHENSIVE ADDICTION AND RECOVERY BILL

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I come to the floor to talk about the heroin and prescription drug epidemic that is gripping my State and the country. I come to talk about the 200,000 people in Ohio who are addicted. I come to talk about the police officers during National Police Week who are doing their jobs to address this issue and why they need more help from us and how we should provide that to them.

This is the sixth time I have come to the floor since the Senate passed on March 10 the legislation called the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. It was voted on by a 94-to-1 vote in this Chamber, which is highly unusual. That never happens around here. It happened because in every single State people are seeing this addiction epidemic, overdose issue. We need to address it.

The House has been working on its own legislation. I have come here every single week we have been in session since we passed our legislation to urge the House to act. I come this week to thank the House for acting because on Friday of last week the House of Representatives passed legislation—again, a large bipartisan vote—18 different bills that were combined into one bill to deal with this opioid epidemic.

In some respects, it is very similar to the legislation we passed in the Senate. In other respects, it has additional provisions that I think are very helpful. In other respects, it doesn't pick up everything that is in the Senate legislation.

Our focus in the Senate would be to have a comprehensive approach, and I believe, by including some of the provisions in the House-passed version, we will come up with a more comprehensive approach, and that is what is needed. In fact, in the Senate we spent 3 months working with the House on companion legislation. We had a number of conferences here in Washington, DC—five different conferences to deal with this issue—and we came up with legislation that took best practices around the country and included them in the legislation to deal with a very real problem in our communities.

It has to be comprehensive. Yesterday I had the opportunity to speak with the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Michael Botticelli, as well as Dr. Kana Enomoto, who is the Acting Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. It was a hearing of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. We were talking about how to come up with the right response to this issue in so many different respects. The bottom line is, both of them strongly agree it has to be a comprehensive approach if we are going to make a difference, if we are going to begin to turn the tide and begin to save lives and get people back on track to deal with this level of drug addiction and overdose that is happening in our communities. We have to provide the resources, but we also have to ensure that the resources are wisely spent. In other words, we have to be sure we are spending the money on things that are going to be effective. I was grateful that both Director Botticelli and Dr. Enomoto said they would work with us to try to get this conference between the House and Senate done as quickly as possible. The House and Senate bills coming together is important so we can get it to the President and, more importantly, so we can get it to the communities to begin to help. They offered to continue to work with us going forward, and I appreciate that, and we will need them. Everybody needs to pull together on this.

It has been 67 days since the Senate acted. In those 67 days, if we assume that about 120 Americans are lost every day to drug overdoses, about 8,000 Americans have lost their lives through drug overdoses since the Senate passed this legislation on March 10. Think about that. That is what I call an epidemic.

Unfortunately, my State of Ohio has been particularly hard hit. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that Ohio had the second most overdoses of any State in the Union, and the fifth highest overdose death

rate. On average, we are losing about five Ohioans every day to overdoses. We lost 330 since the Senate passed the CARA legislation on March 10.

Unfortunately, since March 10 the headlines have continued to show that families are being torn apart, communities devastated. These headlines make it clear this is not slowing down. I talked to some experts on this in Ohio last week, and I asked: Tell me, are things getting better? Are we beginning to change the attitudes to turn the tide? The answer was, no, the hotline is lighting up more than ever, more people are coming for treatment, and there is more crime than ever related to this. Sadly, I do not believe, at least in my home State of Ohio, that we have begun to make the progress we have to make.

It is happening everywhere—in the cities, suburbs, and rural areas. Addiction is affecting everybody of every age no matter where you are from, no matter what neighborhood you live in. It knows no ZIP Code.

Just in the time since I spoke on the floor this last week, in the past week in Ohio, here are some things that have happened. In Northeast Ohio, in the city of Lorraine, police searched three different drug houses. This happened last Thursday. They arrested seven people possessing more than 120 grams of heroin. In Southwest Ohio, in a rural area in Brown County, a couple was arrested for possession of heroin. They have four children between the ages of 3 and 6. This happened last week. In the suburbs of Dayton, OH, this time in the suburbs, Harrison Township, police say a man was driving under the influence of heroin, veered into the wrong lane and struck a vehicle head-on, killing an innocent woman and injuring her husband. More and more traffic accidents are being linked to addiction.

In Central Ohio, in the Columbus area, the city has now spent \$144,000 last year alone on Narcan, which is a miracle drug that will be able to deal with overdoses and save people's lives. Paramedics in Columbus spent 10 percent of their entire budget just on Narcan last year, reversing over 100 overdoses. Paramedic Pete Bolen says that sometimes he takes up to four overdose calls per day. I have been to police stations and firehouses around Ohio, and they tell me they are responding to more overdoses than they are fires.

Dr. Eric Adkins of Ohio State's Wexner Medical Center says that their emergency room sees two to four overdose patients every day. Last year, Wexner spent \$1.2 million treating overdose patients. That is one medical center in one city.

In Chillicothe, Assistant Fire Chief Jeffrey Creed says that overdose calls are on pace to double this year compared to last year. Again, they will tell you there are more overdoses than fires.

Rita Gunning of Grove City, OH, lost her daughter Sara, who was just 30

years old, to a heroin overdose. Last year, Sara was trying to fight an opioid addiction and managed to stay clean for 50 days, but she relapsed, and 3 days later she died of an overdose. Rita is now raising Sara's three children and trying to increase the availability of naloxone across Ohio. She is on a mission because she believes this miracle drug naloxone could have saved her daughter. She said: "Maybe if they had it that night, they could have saved Sara's life." She shouldn't have to say that. By the way, making naloxone more available is one thing the legislation does that was passed in the Senate. We have to be sure the House and Senate legislation does that and also provides the training that goes along with it.

Our legislation also says that when they provide naloxone, or Narcan, they provide not only training with it but also information about where to get treatment because it is not enough to apply Narcan, we need to get these people into treatment so we don't have to apply Narcan again and again and again.

Karen Young of Columbus lost her daughter Kayla when she was just 22. She had surgery when she was 20, and she was prescribed pain pills, as many of us have after surgery. She became addicted to those pain pills, and like so many others, when the pills ran out, she switched to a less expensive and more accessible alternative—heroin. She went to rehab for about 7 weeks, but she relapsed, overdosed, and died—just like that. In the span of 2 years, she developed an addiction because she went in for surgery and she died from it. As Karen put it, "her Dad will never get to walk down the aisle with Kayla."

Unfortunately, that is true with so many thousands of people whose lives are cut short across Ohio and across the country. The stories are heart-wrenching. You hear about kids who go in to have their wisdom teeth pulled. They are given prescription pain pills. They get addicted to the pain pills. They then turn to heroin—or maybe not. Maybe they even die of an overdose from the pain pills themselves, which has happened.

This should not be happening. Over-prescribing of pain medication is obviously one of the huge issues. Four out of five of the heroin addicts in Ohio started with prescription drugs. People need to know that. By the way, our legislation would allow people to know that through an awareness campaign about that very issue.

Unfortunately, these overdoses are just the tip of the iceberg in the sense that in addition to the 8,000 we have lost since March 10 in this country, there are hundreds of thousands more who are among the wounded. What do I mean by that? They have lost their jobs. They have been driven to theft or fraud to pay for their habit. They have gone to jail. They have broken relationships with loved ones because of an addiction.

I hear this time and again from recovering addicts saying: When I had this addiction, the drug was everything. It was everything. That is how my family broke up. That is how I lost my job. That is how I lost my self-respect.

I have seen the consequences firsthand. In Ohio on Monday, I visited a treatment center that was for women only. It is an extraordinary place, the only place in my hometown of Cincinnati where women can take their kids and get treatment, which has been very effective. I got the chance to meet with a number of women who are in recovery. Each had a heart-wrenching story to tell about how they got there. Each was absolutely committed to dealing with their addiction not only for their sakes but also for their baby's sake because these women were pregnant.

In the last 12 years in Ohio, there has been a 750-percent increase of babies born with addiction. This syndrome, babies born with addiction, requires babies to be taken through the same kind of rehab that adults are taken through, of course at different levels of treatment. It is a very sad situation. Many doctors and nurses, who are incredibly compassionate, tell me they don't know what the long-term consequences are.

At this treatment center called First Step Home, which is in my home town, they are doing impressive work. They are teaching women how to be better moms in addition to providing the treatment they need. They don't just get medication, they get a sense of home and security. Talking to these women and listening to their stories inspires me to make the Federal Government a better partner with First Step and other nonprofits around the country to ensure that we are, indeed, beginning to turn this tide.

Today and tomorrow, the Addiction Policy Forum, which is a coalition of advocacy groups, is leading a CARA Family Day on Capitol Hill here in Washington, DC. I will be joining them in that effort. I thank them for calling attention to this pressing issue and for their strong support of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, CARA.

With this being National Police Week, I would also like to thank our police officers who are confronting this epidemic on the frontlines every single day. Police, other first responders, and medical personnel confront this epidemic more than anyone else. I have been told by prosecutors back home that in some counties in Ohio, more than 80 percent of the crime is directly related to this issue of heroin and prescription drug addiction. I am told that in some areas, nearly all of the thefts that are committed are done by those struggling with addiction to pay for their habit.

The Fraternal Order of Police has been incredibly helpful to us in this legislation. They contributed valuable

advice and feedback during the 3 years we were crafting CARA. I am grateful for their help and for their endorsement of CARA, which was very important to getting such a strong vote on the floor of the House and Senate.

Police officers across Ohio have told me about the extent of the epidemic. They have told me about the need for the Federal Government to take action that is comprehensive.

Major Jay McDonald, who is the president of Ohio's Fraternal Order of Police has told me that "heroin mixed with fentanyl is the most deadly drug cocktail I've witnessed in my entire career." I visited a place called Jody's House with him. It is a residential house for women in recovery in Marion, OH. Major McDonald told me that our response should include enforcement, prevention, and treatment. In other words, it has to be comprehensive. He is absolutely right.

Our police want CARA for a lot of reasons. For example, CARA would authorize new law enforcement task forces around the country to investigate trafficking in heroin, fentanyl, methamphetamines, and prescription drugs. Police know that these extra resources will help them to do their job. By the way, these task forces are not included in the House-passed legislation. We have to get that in conference to ensure that we are helping our police officers who are out there on the frontlines.

Another reason I think the law enforcement community wants CARA passed is that they are using naloxone more and more every day. First responders used it 16,000 times in Ohio last year—16,000 times. CARA would increase access to naloxone. It would improve the training so that they could be more effective in administering this miracle drug in time to save a life.

It would also insist, again, as it is being administered, that the drug treatment programs in the community locally are made available—information available to people—so that we are not just seeing this revolving door. If we give our police the tools they need, they will be able to save even more lives and get more people into treatment.

Our police are also helping to take drugs off the street. Since 2014, DEA agents in Ohio, working with local police departments, have seized more than 171 kilograms of heroin. Federal agents have now arrested more than 70 drug traffickers or drug dealers in Ohio in the last year alone.

Sometimes the intervention of a police officer is exactly what it takes to get somebody into treatment. I have found that again and again. Two weeks ago, there was a heartbreaking story of a woman in the Miami Valley area—Dayton area—named Cheri, who said she was glad her son was in jail because "I would rather have him sitting behind bars in jail than have to carry him out in a body bag."

Two weeks ago in Wellington, OH, there was a town meeting held about

the crisis. Nicole Walmsley told the story of how, after postpartum surgery at age 19, she was prescribed a prescription pain killer. She became addicted. She ended up being arrested 18 times and convicted of two felonies. "I sold my morals; I sold my soul. Drugs became everything."

After an overdose in Youngstown, she begged her probation officer to send her to jail. That is how bad it is. That is how difficult it is sometimes to find treatment. She asked the police officer and the judge to send her to prison because that is the best way to get good treatment, to be convicted of a felony. Even then, sometimes the best treatment is not available.

That is the status quo today. Unless and until we get a more comprehensive bill to the President and signed into law, this continues. Too many are going without treatment. Too many are afraid to come forward. Too many are treating this not as a disease that needs to be treated, which it is, but instead are concerned about the stigma.

We need to get people to come forward and come into treatment. But thanks to help from police, in the case of Nicole, as I mentioned, she did get treatment. For 3 years now, she has been living a clean and productive life and helping others do so too. Police across Ohio have been offering treatment to those struggling with addiction.

I am impressed with what is going on in Lucas County, Ohio, which is in the Toledo area. Sheriff Tharp has started a drug abuse response team that offers addiction counseling, free rides to treatment for those who need it, and followup visits for those who have overdosed. In talking to Sheriff Tharp and some of his deputies about this, they have made an incredible difference in people's lives.

In Lodi, OH, anyone can simply turn themselves in to the police, and they will get treatment with no questions asked. This is done using private donations entirely. This year they have already placed in rehabilitation 28 people who had no insurance and no income. The police there report that since they started the program, overdoses and property crimes have decreased considerably.

In Wellington and in Auglaize County, police make the same offer: Turn yourself in and get treatment. We will not ask any questions. We will get you the help you need. I am told this is also the case in Creston, OH, and Newark, OH. So locally, police departments are taking up this issue and dealing with it effectively. I salute them for that.

I also salute them for putting their lives on the line every day for all of us and for their compassionate care of those they run across who need this treatment. I know the statistics about drug abuse are heartbreaking. They can certainly be discouraging, including the relapse rates. But thanks in part to our police officers and good treatment providers around the coun-

try, such as those I visited on Monday, there are a lot of stories of hope, too, that encourage and inspire us. Many of those who are struggling have inspirational stories too.

In Colerain Township, near my hometown, police have started what is called a quick response team of police, paramedics, and addiction counselors. When they arrest someone or save them from an overdose, they get them into treatment—again, not just applying Narcan but getting them into treatment. Last summer, they found Damon Carroll, who was just 22 years old, on his bedroom floor after an overdose. They got him counseling and treatment. Damon is now living a clean and productive life working at a restaurant. You know who stops by his house and stops by the restaurant and makes sure he is okay? The police officers who found him. Thanks to our police, he is beating this. There is hope. They saved a life. They are helping this young man to live out his God-given potential.

I hope we can send comprehensive legislation to the White House as soon as possible because it is needed. It is urgent. It is an emergency. We have lost nearly 8,000 Americans since the Senate passed this Comprehensive Addiction Recovery Act. That is the status quo today. Again, that does not begin to tell the story of those who have not died because of an overdose but struggle with addiction every day.

Our police officers and those nonprofits I talked about, those treatment centers, those who are struggling with addiction—all of them deserve better. They deserve us to act. Again, we are not going to solve the problem here in Washington, DC, but we can be better partners with State and local governments, with these nonprofits, with these law enforcement officials around the country who are dealing with this issue every day. They deserve a better partner.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEE). The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I was pleased to come over here early before I spoke and listen to my colleague from Ohio. We have the same issues in Indiana. I think probably the Presiding Officer's State and every State has serious opioid addiction issues, particularly with our young people. We cannot solve all of the problems here. We have passed a piece of legislation. Hopefully we can reconcile with the House shortly and put it on the President's desk. In a number of ways, that will provide the support for dealing with this problem.

It is a national issue, it is a State issue, it is a city issue, it is a smalltown issue, and it is a rural America issue. It is all hands on deck here. We are losing precious lives through this scourge of addiction that is sweeping through our country.

WASTEFUL SPENDING

Mr. President, today I am back, as I have been every week for now 43 weeks

for the waste of the week. The "Waste of the Week" is where I highlight waste, fraud, and abuse in the Federal Government system that is using hard-earned taxpayer dollars that ought to be able to be used by the taxpayer to pay the mortgage, pay the bills at the end of the week, to put aside some money hopefully for the children's education as they grow, or for any number of needs out there.

We have the responsibility and the duty to be carefully managing the tax money that is assessed to our public. "Waste of the Week" has pointed out some significant examples, yet drop-in-the-bucket of expenditures that have not been successful, have not been used for the purpose they are supposed to be used, part of the waste, fraud, and abuse category of now nearly—well, nearing \$200 billion. That is not small change.

This week, I am highlighting a Federal program that has a lousy track record and over \$7 billion in leftover money—funds Congress has appropriated for this program. Let me explain the program. In 2008, shortly after the economic recession began, Congress created something called the Home Affordable Modification Program; in short, HAMP. This is a new emergency program established to help homeowners facing financial distress to avoid foreclosure by reducing their monthly mortgage payments.

All this occurred at a time when our country truly was in distress—a serious recession. People were working less hours or no hours. Those who owned homes were finding it difficult if not impossible to pay the monthly mortgage payments.

So the HAMP program, which is a voluntary program for homeowners and mortgage lenders—if the two of them get together and agree to restructure their home loan payments, they can stay in their home, and it doesn't have to go through foreclosure. It is a sensible program at a time of real need. Lenders work through the Treasury Department to reduce those monthly mortgage payments to no higher than about one-third of the homeowners' income.

Historically, if you are telling your kids about buying a home or you are graduating from school and you want to buy a home, the solid advice has always been, don't commit yourself to more than 25 percent of the income you are earning to pay on your mortgage. You are going to need the rest of that money to pay the rest of your bills—all the utilities, food, transportation, buying a car, and so forth and so on. Well, this program said all the way up to a third. If you qualified on that, we would use 33 percent instead of 25 percent and restructure your mortgage so that you had a lower payment you had to make each month on that mortgage.

The Department of Treasury put this program in place. It was scheduled to expire at the end of 2012. In 2013, after the program had technically expired,

an inspector general found that the number of participants who ended up redefaulting on their new modified mortgage was “increasing at an alarming rate.”

What is this word “reditdefaulting”? Look, if you don’t pay your mortgage payments, you are in default. If you are in default long enough, the bank or the mortgage company that is holding your mortgage says: We are going to foreclosure and take your house back because you are not making payments. This program was designed to help people avoid that catastrophe.

Reditdefaulting is the process by which the person, having already agreed to—with the mortgage company and with the support of the Federal Government, the person agreed to a program to lower the payments so they could keep their house. They defaulted again, so the technical term is redefaulting, but it is two defaults. So if Joe Smith has problems and he gets with his lender, he gets a new program, but then down the line, he defaults again.

According to the inspector general, this became something that needed to be addressed because we simply cannot continue to proceed with this program with the taxpayers’ dollars if the participants aren’t doing their share.

Despite the poor performance, the administration unilaterally—and how many times have we seen this happen during the Obama administration?—bypassing Congress, they unilaterally extended the program beyond its December 2012 expiration date. Interestingly enough, even with this extension, the number of applicants steadily declined. People either couldn’t meet the measures or they didn’t need it. The economy was improving, and they didn’t need to do this. According to the Treasury Department, the number of HAMP participants declined because there was a shrinking number of eligible mortgagees.

Given that the outcomes of those receiving help were largely subpar and the number of applicants was declining, you would think we would come to the conclusion that the program needed to be terminated. It was already extended past the deadline, but on the basis of what was happening with the program, essentially we should terminate that.

When HAMP was created, the goal was to help about 4 million homeowners. Unfortunately, as it turned out, the program ended with only 1.3 million homeowners making it through the trial phase and ultimately being accepted into the program. Of those people, about one-third ultimately redefaulted, costing taxpayers an additional \$1.5 billion.

We had a broken program. What was left in the fund with the Treasury was \$7 billion. Some people call these slush funds. This is money that has been appropriated, put into a program—not expended in the program but sits there. How many times have we heard about government agencies with excess tax-

payer money saying: Don’t give it back.

Now, of course, this is the Treasury. Sometimes we say: Give it back to the Treasury. This is the Treasury itself. Well, don’t terminate this and give it back; we might want to use it for something else.

That is a classic way of describing how Washington often works. Spend all the money that is appropriated to you, or they will reduce the money they give you next year. I previously sat on the Appropriations Committee, and this is not a one-off proposition. Every year, we have to scrub through these agencies’ expenditures, and we find that there is excessive spending at the end of the fiscal year so that they don’t get a reduced amount of funds sent to them for the next fiscal year.

Think of the ways this money could be used if it was put back into the Treasury. No. 1, it could be used for essential Federal functions. Wouldn’t NIH like to have \$7 billion to be able to hopefully break through on a wonder drug that would address Alzheimer’s or diabetes or something else? Wouldn’t the Department of Defense want to have this money for the shortcomings they have had because of the drastic reduction in expenditures for our national defense and security? Wouldn’t any number of Federal agencies that produce essential programs that have to be addressed financially want to use that money for the right purposes? Most important of all, wouldn’t the taxpayer want to get that money back or not have it spent at all or use it? Wouldn’t the Treasury want to use it to reduce our ever-deepening national defense? So there are a lot of uses for this money that is sloshing around in a trust fund—not a trust fund, but sloshing around in the fund held by the Treasury Department.

This is a waste because it is sitting there. It is going to be spent on something that it was not intended to be spent on. For that reason, it becomes the waste of the week. As the waste of the week, we add \$7 billion to our ever-growing total of waste, fraud, and abuse, taking our total overall to \$170 billion. This is not small change. We have people struggling in America to make ends meet. They live paycheck to paycheck. They want their hard-earned dollars that are taken from their paycheck used for the right purposes. If the money is not used for the right purposes, they don’t want to send it; they want it back.

We have an accountability to the American people, the people we represent, to do the best we can to provide the most efficient, effective use of their tax dollars. If we can’t provide that—this is just, as I said, a drop in the bucket. I could be standing here every day with a waste of the day. I could be standing here every hour with a waste of the hour. We have a responsibility to be accountable to the people whose money is taken by the Federal Government and used. They don’t mind

using it for the right things. Maybe a veterans program needs that \$7 billion to treat more veterans better than the way they are treated now.

In any event, we add this, and we have \$170-plus billion in documented waste, fraud, and abuse.

I will be back next week with the next version, and we will continue to expose funding that is unnecessary and is putting a real burden on our hard-earned tax dollars being paid to the Federal Government.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

IRAN’S INFLUENCE ON IRAQ AND SYRIA

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise today to draw attention to the pernicious and malign impact that the Iranian Government and its intrusion into Iraq and Syria are having on regional security, on the condition of people in those two countries, and on the stability and future of that whole region.

Today, Iraq is riven by sectarian divides, confronted with the presence of barbaric ISIS terrorists in its north and west, and led by a tragically fragile government. Meanwhile, the oppression of the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria has helped create a humanitarian crisis on the scale of nothing we have seen since the Second World War.

Iran claims that it wants to be a legitimate, contributing member of the international community, but despite those claims, Iran has played and continues to play a major role in fomenting instability in Iraq and Syria and in exacerbating security, political, and military crises in both countries.

Today, I wish to give just a brief overview of the tragedies of Iraq and Syria, explain Iran’s destabilizing role in each country, and highlight a number of the steps I think the United States can take to counter Iran’s dangerous influence.

Let’s begin with where we are today in Iraq. In recent months, Iraqi and coalition forces have reduced the territorial presence of ISIS in Iraq by roughly 40 percent. Since taking office in 2014, Prime Minister Haydar al-Abadi has taken concrete steps to reduce corruption, to share power with Kurdish and Sunni leaders, and to form a competent, technocratic government that can deliver real results for the Iraqi people and reduce the many grievances that have forced Iraqis into the arms of extremists. Yet dangerous divides continue to paralyze the Abadi government, hindering Iraq’s ability to fight ISIS and to defend against the terrorist attacks that have killed hundreds of people, 200 in the last week alone.

As coalition forces retake land previously captured by ISIS, ISIS appears to be bringing its savage and barbaric tactics to the capital city of Baghdad in brutal attacks in recent days and in other attempts to stoke sectarianism and to distract the Abadi government

from its efforts to retake the major city of Mosul. Sectarian divisions among the Iraqi people and within the government itself make political reconciliation and a coherent national military campaign against ISIS even more difficult.

Syria, meanwhile, faces a nearly unimaginable humanitarian crisis. Since March of 2011, more than 400,000 Syrians have been killed and more than 1 million injured because the Assad regime has engaged in a murderous campaign against its own people in order to cling to power. Some estimates put the number of dead as high as half a million Syrians. Nearly 5 million Syrians have been forced out of their own country, with 6.5 million displaced internally and 13.5 million in need of humanitarian assistance. Even more tragically, a huge number of those Syrians have been unable to receive international aid or relief because the Assad regime blocks access to international aid organizations.

Rather than playing a constructive role in this tortured, difficult region, such as by contributing more meaningfully to the anti-ISIS fight or by moderating conflicting factions, Iran continues to prop up the Assad regime. In fact, without Iran's help, I believe Assad would have likely fallen or come to the table to negotiate peace by now. Instead, Iran continues to foment instability, sectarian violence, and support terrorism.

In Iraq, Iran continues to fund Shia militias who seek to capitalize upon and exacerbate tensions between Iraq's Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish populations. Iranian-backed Shia militias have pushed ISIS out of some areas, but rather than allowing Sunni civilians to peaceably return and rebuild, they have engaged in killings and human rights violations against the very Sunni communities they have just liberated from ISIS.

According to Human Rights Watch, in response to ISIS bombings in the Iraqi town of Muqadiyah in January of 2016, Shia militias "demolished Sunni homes, stores, and mosques" and abducted and killed dozens of Sunni civilians. This is just one of many examples of atrocities committed by Iranian-backed Shia militias in recent months. These killings further raise tensions and drive more recruits to ISIS and other extremist groups.

In Syria, Iran has joined Russia in providing the aid that has kept the Assad regime in power, despite hundreds of thousands willing to fight against Assad and despite the coordinated effort of many countries.

Although Iran's Government denies the presence of its military forces in Syria, it is clear that in addition to financial support and weapons, Iran has sent thousands of its own troops to reinforce the murderous regime of Assad. One estimate puts the number of Iranian forces in Syria at 3,000, including 2,000 of the elite Quds Force, a select group of fighters from the Iranian Rev-

olutionary Guard Corps, the hard-line group dedicated to preserving the reactionary Iranian Government. In total, more than 700 Iranians are believed to have been killed in Syria, directly contradicting Iran's claims that it is not involved in the conflict. In fact, Iraq recently doubled down on its support for Assad by sending soldiers from the regular Iranian army to join the IRGC troops on the ground in Syria. There are rumors that they are even mobilizing and deploying Afghans and others from the region to join militias in support of Assad.

Although it remains clear that a lasting resolution to the Syrian conflict will be impossible until Assad leaves power, Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei, said in a recent televised interview that "the removal of Assad . . . is a redline for us."

As long as Iran continues to increase its support—its military support, its financial support—for Assad, it will bear direct responsibility for the carnage in Syria, rising extremism on all sides of the conflict, and the humanitarian exodus from Syria that is causing massive suffering and destabilizing countries on three continents.

This behavior from Iran is a clear sign that the regime is not to be trusted, does not intend to comply with international norms, and deserves close scrutiny and constant pushback from the United States and our allies.

Briefly—noting another colleague who stands to speak soon—there are a number of steps the United States and our allies have to take in response. At the very least, to prevent Iran from obtaining the material necessary to advance its nuclear program, we must work with our allies to tightly enforce all four corners of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the nuclear agreement between Iran, the United States, and other world powers.

We must continue to work with our allies and their navies to interdict Iran's ongoing illegal weapons shipments to support the Houthis and other of their terrorist proxies in the region, not just in Yemen, but in Gaza, Bahrain, and Lebanon. Since February, U.S. forces and allied navies have, on at least three occasions, interdicted in international waters shipments of thousands of AK-47s, anti-tank missiles, grenade launchers, sniper rifles, and other weapons destined from Iran to the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

The United States must continue to maintain sanctions on Iran for its support for terrorism, its human rights violations, and its continued illegal ballistic missile tests. We must be willing to sanction both individuals and entities linked to the IRGC and Iran's continued and illegal ballistic missile program. In addition to punishing Iran for its dangerous and provocative behavior, these actions send a signal to Iran that the international national community will not tolerate its ongoing bad behavior.

We have to use diplomatic channels to urge countries such as Russia to not sell more dangerous arms to the Iranian regime—allegedly defensive arms that will simply further destabilize the regime—and to press Russia to allow U.N. Security Council action in response to Iran's recent ballistic missile tests.

Finally, we have to continue to make smart investments in training, technology, and innovation, on which our military depends. America's ability to push back on Iran critically depends on maintaining a credible conventional military deterrent.

The United States must do everything we can to support our allies in the Middle East, in particular by strengthening our partnership with the State of Israel, by concluding a new 10-year memorandum of understanding that provides a reliable long-term and significantly enhanced pathway toward support. Senator GRAHAM and I, along with 81 of our colleagues, recently wrote a letter to the President urging the administration to support a stronger MOU to ensure Israel has the resources it needs to defend itself in this chaotic region.

In closing, in the years to come, I hope this body will be just as dedicated to enforcing the terms of the nuclear agreement with Iran and pushing back on Iran's continued dangerous behavior outside the parameters of the deal as we were in the months leading up to its consideration in this body. Iran continues to exercise a malign influence on Iraq, on Syria, and the region. It is our responsibility to use every tool we have to make it clear to Iran that we will contain its bad behavior and we will not tolerate its ongoing actions.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I rise to discuss my amendment with Senator BLUMENTHAL that would extend the Veterans Choice Card Program for 3 years and restore funding that was moved out of the program last year.

Our amendment is critically important. It extends the Veterans Choice Card Program so it does not expire prematurely next year. It restores funding removed from the program last year to pay for other VA programs, provides additional funding to stabilize the VA Choice Card Program for the next 3 years while Congress works on a long-term solution to reform veterans health care, and allows the Secretary of the VA to standardize and modernize the way it pays all the doctors, hospitals, and clinics participating in the many programs the VA offers to veterans to get the care they need in their communities.

I was very proud 2 years ago that Congress acted quickly to pass major VA reform legislation following the scandal in care that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of veterans waiting endlessly for care. We now know that

what was originally uncovered in Phoenix, AZ, had been occurring throughout the country. Fortunately, we acted decisively, and in a bipartisan manner, by passing the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act in near-record time. That law provided extra emergency funding for the VA to hire doctors and nurses and to build more hospitals and clinics.

Perhaps the most important and the most promising piece of the legislation was the \$10 billion emergency fund for the Veterans Choice Card Program. This program allows any veteran who has to wait more than 30 days for an appointment or lives more than 40 miles from a VA facility to visit a participating doctor in their community instead of continuing to wait for care with no options. After an extremely difficult start, the Veterans Choice Card Program is now authorizing more than 150,000 appointments for veterans care per month—over 6,000 per workday.

According to the VA, as of the end of March, nearly 1 million appointments for veterans had been scheduled under the Veterans Choice Card Program. Each of these appointments represents a veteran's appointment that would have otherwise been delayed potentially for months in the VA's scheduling system.

An extra advantage of the Choice Card is it also helps veterans who don't use it. By enabling some veterans to receive care in their community, the VA is able to free up its appointment backlog and accommodate veteran appointments sooner.

Over the last year, the number of participating doctors and medical professionals in the Veterans Choice Program in the western region has jumped from around 95,000 to nearly 160,000. The turnover rate is very low. More than 90 percent of all doctors are being paid within 30 days, and the great majority of doctors are choosing to stay in the Veterans Choice Card Program to treat our Nation's veterans.

Unfortunately, under current law, the Veterans Choice Card Program is scheduled to expire in the middle of next year. The Veterans Choice Card Program is capped at \$10 billion in emergency spending and 3 years of operation, whichever is reached first.

I know Members on both sides of the aisle don't want to return to the status quo of never-ending wait times for appointments and poor care at the VA. Too many of our constituents have been harmed, too many lives devastated.

I remember standing on the Senate floor in 2014 and urging passage of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act. At that time, we acknowledged the Veterans Choice Program was a first step toward fully reforming the VA. That law created a blue-ribbon Commission on Care that is still meeting and owes Congress recommendations this summer on long-term reform, but we need time for hearings,

investigations, oversight and analysis of the Commission's report to get long-term reform right.

As the chairman and ranking member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee will attest, this is the dictionary definition of an emergency. While we cannot rush the reforms the VA health care system needs, we also cannot bring the Veterans Choice Program to a full stop. Too many veterans and VA hospitals depend on the Veterans Choice Program to provide care in a timely fashion.

I have heard from multiple Administrators and VA officials who have told me and my staff that they do not know what they will do if the Veterans Choice Card Program ends. I urge my colleagues to adopt this amendment and commit to continuing the hard work of enacting long-term reform to the VA health care system.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment in order to call up amendment No. 4039 with the changes that are at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, JOHN MCCAIN is my good friend for whom I have ultimate respect. I was just informed of this amendment and was informed it would not enable—we have a real problem in Rochester, where they do not have enough VA services. They have to drive very far away to go to a big metropolitan area.

I am going to object, hoping I can talk to my friend from Arizona to see if we can work this out. So I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I don't know what the credentials are of the Senator from New York as far as veterans are concerned, but I know this. I know that what the Senator from New York is stopping is 160,000 veterans—160,000 veterans—from participating in this program in the western part of the United States.

Mr. SCHUMER. If my colleague will yield. What I am simply asking for is not to block it but to sit and talk with him to see what exactly his amendment does and the effect it will have on Rochester.

I was just told of it. That is all I want to do. I don't know the details. I have great respect for my friend, but I have an obligation to the veterans in Rochester who have come to me about their problem, and so I want to talk to my colleague about it.

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

Mr. SCHUMER. 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. BLUMENTHAL. 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. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I hope very strongly that my colleague and friend the Senator from New York and Senator MCCAIN will succeed in resolving this potential roadblock to amendment No. 4039, because I very fervently support it.

The amendment would extend the temporary Veterans Choice Program for an additional 3 years and provide funding to do so. The extension of this program is vital, and the current authorization is coming to an end. At this point, we lack a path forward on any of the proposals to overhaul the VA's care in the community program.

While the Veterans Choice Program has been far from perfect, requiring multiple legislative and administrative changes to make it function for veterans, extending it for an additional 3 years will allow us to address these necessary changes that Senators TESTER and BURR have provided in a bipartisan way in the committee earlier this year. I remain committed to working with them and with Chairman ISAKSON to make further changes to the program as well as continuing to improve access to care within the VA, which is the preferred choice for many veterans.

In addition to extending Choice, this amendment also would allow the VA to move closer to consolidating existing programs for care in the community, eliminating some of the bureaucratic hurdles to smooth contracting for the VA. I thank my colleague from Arizona Senator MCCAIN for championing this cause because this amendment will ensure that all veterans currently using Project ARCH to access care through the VA will be grandfathered into the Veterans Choice Program. This is important for some veterans in rural areas to maintain continuity in care. It is of great interest to our colleagues from Maine and Kansas and other States where these veterans live, primarily, but to all of us who care about veterans health care.

I urge my colleagues to support this amendment as well as to support The Veterans First Act, another bipartisan bill I was pleased to work on with Chairman ISAKSON to achieve—that bill makes additional changes to veterans health care to improve opioid therapy, access to chiropractic care, as well as ensuring strong accountability within the Department.

Again, I express my appreciation to my colleague and friend Senator MCCAIN and say that I look forward to working with him closely on this amendment, which would be helpful, in my view, to the Veterans Choice Program. Without this extension, the Veterans Choice Program would expire next year before Congress enacts long-term reform for veterans health. The stability provided by this extension and funding will help ensure maximum participation by doctors, hospitals, and clinics in the community who wish to treat our veterans.

This amendment is one I support, having worked with my colleague Senator McCAIN on it, and I am very hopeful we can move forward with the support of this body.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I would tell Senator SCHUMER's staff that he may want to come back.

What Senator SCHUMER is asking for is a 25-year lease on a clinic in Rochester, NY, according to his staff.

I have been privy to examples of blocking the greater good because of a specific geographic area, but I have to say that I haven't seen anything quite like this one.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum, and I will talk one more time with the Senator from New York.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUNT. 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. BLUNT. Mr. President, this is an important issue that is being discussed on the floor. I join Senator BLUMENTHAL certainly in my commitment to do whatever we can to extend more choice to veterans.

I believe there are less than a handful of issues in which the VA is, in all likelihood, the best provider. They should be better at post-traumatic stress than anything else. The VA should be better at IED-attack injuries. They should be better at prosthetics. There is no reason they should be the better place to have your heart valve replaced or your kidney cancer dealt with.

More choice for veterans is better for veterans, and will make the VA a better provider than the VA is today. So I am certainly supportive of that discussion.

Mr. President, Senator WARNER and I today have filed an amendment to the transportation bill, which is the part of this debate that deals with transportation. The BRIDGE Act creates new ways to help us fund our Nation's infrastructure.

Last year, Congress was finally able to come together to pass a bipartisan highway bill, the FAST Act. It took a while to get to the FAST Act. We had 37 short-term extensions of the highway bill from 2009 on, but we finally have a 5-year highway bill that provides certainty for the next 5 years. This is a chance when, at every level of government, we can now put extra tools in the toolbox, and we can involve the private sector in ways that it has not been involved as a funding partner. There are many things the private sector can do in partnership with the public sector.

Strengthening our overall infrastructure, especially our transportation network, is vital to boosting economic

growth, to creating jobs, and to increasing competitiveness in Missouri, in Senator WARNER's State of Virginia, and across the Nation. Current infrastructure fails to meet our current needs, including our drinking water, highways and ports, and energy transmission.

In addition to all the things we see above ground, there are many things below ground that need to be dealt with. Part of the storm water system in the city of St. Louis was built while Abraham Lincoln was President. It is amazing how long wood will last if you keep it soaked in water for 152 years or so, but that is what a part of that system is all about. We are way short in infrastructure investments. Senator WARNER and I, for three Congresses now, have been trying to find the best way to add more ability to do more of the things that need to be done. We have a transportation system that is interconnected, with an extensive network of highways, roads, and bridges, and of freight and passenger railroads, urban and rural rail transit systems, airports, waterways, and pipelines. All of those things make us more competitive than we would be otherwise, and more competitive means better jobs. It means that people living paycheck to paycheck have an opportunity to have paycheck to paycheck plus savings. They have an opportunity to have paycheck to paycheck plus retirement. They have an opportunity to see those things happen that need to happen in their lives and for their families.

The transportation system links our country. It links urban and rural America. It serves as the backbone for interstate commerce, and it connects the United States to the rest of the world. Our economic competitiveness and our ability to export in the most competitive way is very dependent on our infrastructure.

The American energy revolution is directly related to the ability to access unconventional oil and gas. We have more new American energy than we ever dreamed possible. We can access that energy, but we don't have a way to transport the energy that we need to use it most efficiently.

The Greater Mississippi River Basin—the biggest contiguous piece of agricultural land in the world—is where the waterways of the country come together. These waterways allow us to be more competitive. They allow farmers to easily ship their products to domestic and foreign markets. A modern transportation system will be key to remaining competitive with other grain producers elsewhere in the world. Brazil is a great example of a country whose ability to grow agricultural products has far outgrown its infrastructure. The ability to compete—the ability to get things to market, the ability to get things all over the world—is dramatically impacted by that.

The American Society of Civil Engineers continues to give the United

States poor marks on our infrastructure and says that we need billions of dollars in investment over the next several years to bring it up to adequate conditions.

The BRIDGE Act is not a way for Federal taxpayers to become responsible for every local obligation but for States and communities, along with the Federal Government, to have new ways to do the things that need to be done. We can't continue to ignore the infrastructure needs of the country. We particularly can't continue to ignore the infrastructure needs of the country that we can't see.

We just saw appropriate attention in Flint, MI, to a problem that didn't meet the eye because it is underground. The gas lines, the water lines, the storm sewer lines all need attention. The capital markets and private sector investors have growing interest in being a part of meeting that great infrastructure need. The BRIDGE Act will incentivize private sector investment by establishing an independent infrastructure financing authority to provide loans and loan guarantees to critical infrastructure projects, including transportation, water, and energy infrastructure. It is a proposal like the ones we need to help close the gap that needs to be closed.

During this week—a week in which I am not sure how the planning worked here—we have the transportation bill on the floor during infrastructure week. I think we ought to give serious consideration not just to the infrastructure that we appropriate money for but the process and the tools we put in place so that the infrastructure needs of the country can be met.

I am certainly pleased to get to work with Senator WARNER on this project. We have had lots of input from people who understand the infrastructure needs of the country. I hope the Congress will look at this as one of the things that can be done to help meet those needs.

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.

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

Mr. McCAIN. Mr. President, I thank Senator WARNER from Virginia and Senator SCHUMER from New York. They are committed to the veterans in their States and in this country.

I believe we have worked out an agreement to try to get the veterans the services they have earned and are not receiving at this time.

AMENDMENT NO. 4039 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3896

Mr. President, the usual calm and quiet conversation has led to a conclusion that now I can ask unanimous

consent to set aside the pending amendment in order to call up amendment No. 4039.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Arizona [Mr. MCCAIN] proposes an amendment numbered 4039 to amendment No. 3896.

Mr. MCCAIN. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To extend and expand eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs and to establish consistent criteria and standards relating to the use of amounts under the Medical Community Care account of the Department of Veterans Affairs)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

EXTENSION AND EXPANSION OF VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM

SEC. 251. (a) EXTENSION.—The Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146; 38 U.S.C. 1701 note) is amended—

(1) in section 101(p)(2), by striking “3 years” and inserting “6 years”; and

(2) in section 802(d)(1), by striking “\$10,000,000,000” and inserting “\$17,500,000,000”.

(b) EXPANSION OF ELIGIBILITY.—Subsection (b)(2) of section 101 of such Act is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (C)(ii), by striking “; or” and inserting a semicolon;

(2) in subparagraph (D)(ii)(II)(dd), by striking the period at the end and inserting “; or”; and

(3) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

“(E) has received health services under the pilot program under section 403 of the Veterans’ Mental Health and Other Care Improvements Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-387; 38 U.S.C. 1703 note) and resides in a location described in section (b)(2) of such section.”.

(c) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—(1) Subsection (g)(3) of such section is amended by striking “or (D)” and inserting “(D), or (E)”.

(2) Subsection (q)(2)(A) of such section is amended—

(A) in clause (iii), by striking “; and” and inserting a semicolon;

(B) in clause (iv), by striking the period at the end and inserting “; and”; and

(C) by adding at the end the following new clause:

“(v) eligible veterans described in subsection (b)(2)(E).”.

(d) EMERGENCY REQUIREMENT.—The amounts made available under the amendments made by subsection (a) are designated by the Congress as an emergency requirement pursuant to section 251(b)(2)(A)(i) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (2 U.S.C. 901(b)(2)(A)(i)).

(e) QUARTERLY REPORT.—Not less frequently than quarterly until all amounts deposited in the Veterans Choice Fund under section 802 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146; 38 U.S.C. 1701 note) are exhausted, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Appropriations and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Appropriations and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives an update on the expenditures

made from such Fund to carry out section 101 of such Act during the quarter covered by the report.

ESTABLISHMENT OF CRITERIA FOR PROVISION OF SERVICES UNDER MEDICAL COMMUNITY CARE ACCOUNT

SEC. 252. In using amounts made available in this title for the Medical Community Care account of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish consistent criteria and standards—

(1) for purposes of determining eligibility of non-Department health care providers to provide health care under the laws administered by the Secretary, including standards relating to education, certification, licensure, training, and employment history; and

(2) for the reimbursement of such health care providers for care or services provided under the laws administered by the Secretary, which to the extent practicable shall—

(A) use rates for reimbursement that are not more than the rates paid by the United States to a provider of services (as defined in section 1861(u) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395x(u))) under the Medicare program under title XVIII of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395 et seq.) for the same care or services;

(B) incorporate the use of value-based reimbursement models to promote the provision of high-quality care to improve health outcomes and the experience of care for veterans; and

(C) be consistent with prompt payment standards required of Federal agencies under chapter 39 of title 31, United States Code.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Arizona for working with us on this very important issue of making sure that veterans in a number of our States are able to get quality care in a location that is convenient to them, and I appreciate his partnering with me and Senator SCHUMER and others on this issue.

Mr. President, I was going to rise earlier when the Senator from Missouri spoke to talk about the question around infrastructure investment. This is infrastructure investment week, and stakeholders from across the country are here to continue to raise the question that we need to do more to rebuild our Nation’s crumbling infrastructure. We all know that recently we passed a 5-year highway bill, and I supported it. The FAST Act—as it was called—was a good bill, but it included only modest increases in funding. Whether we look at our region’s Metro or the Memorial Bridge that many of us travel on a regular basis or airports or water systems all over the country, it is clear that we need to look at additional ways to invest in our Nation’s infrastructure.

Senator BLUNT and I have filed an amendment to the current Transportation appropriations bill that we had before us that would establish a National Infrastructure Financing Authority. The BRIDGE Act that is co-sponsored by six Republicans and six Democrats is bringing about a new tool to make innovative ways to finance projects. I believe my friend, the Senator from Connecticut, is a supporter of this type of approach.

Our bipartisan BRIDGE Act creates a \$10 billion government loan fund—a

loan fund that will repay. It doesn’t add a single dime to the Federal deficit. All experts say this modest initial investment ultimately could unlock up to \$300 billion in private sector capital to invest in our Nation’s infrastructure.

Let’s be honest. We all know why we are here. The funding mechanisms that our transportation system relies on are simply unsustainable. We spend more money each year just in maintaining our highway trust fund and highway system than our highway trust fund brings in, yet our needs continue to grow.

The American Society of Civil Engineers recently gave the United States a D-plus grade on infrastructure. I don’t know about my friend, the Senator from New York, but I am sure that he often preferred grades better than D-plus when he was a student.

If we look over recent times, this is not a Democrat or Republican issue; this is a problem that has been gnawing at this country for some time. There has been a 50-percent decrease in infrastructure investment as a percentage of our GDP since the 1970s. The United States spends less than 2 percent of our gross domestic product on infrastructure.

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, underinvestment in our national infrastructure will cost each American family \$3,400 a year. That is wasted time. That is a city in gridlock. That is not being able to get to work and not being able to be with one’s family. The most significant gap, of course, is not only in water but, obviously, in transportation, where it has been estimated that an additional \$1 trillion is needed across the network—including roads, bridges, rail—during the next decade. Again, I point to many of the Members in this body and so many of the folks who work for us simply traveling across the Memorial Bridge, one of our Nation’s icons, which is basically in a crumbling state.

Meanwhile, if we look at nations around the world in terms of what they are doing—remember the United States is under 2 percent of GDP investment and infrastructure—Europe and India spend about 5 percent of their GDP on an annual basis in infrastructure. China spends nearly 9 percent. Australia already has a national infrastructure financing authority. China also has a national infrastructure funding authority that is building out national high-speed rail networks.

Think about it. For most of the 20th century, it was American infrastructure that led to America’s economic dominance in the 20th century. Today, whether that is flying into our airports, looking at our rail system, or looking at our crumbling roads and systems, in many ways, America’s infrastructure is a disgrace and actually retards economic growth.

As we tighten our belts at the State level—and I say that as a former Governor—and at the Federal level, we

need to do everything we can to invest in infrastructure as a means of not only providing jobs but helping the flow of goods and people and services to stay competitive in the global economy.

Despite the recent passage of the so-called FAST Act, only 6 percent of infrastructure funding in the United States is from the private sector. With over \$2.2 trillion sitting on private ledgers looking for a place to invest, that meager 6-percent figure, in terms of private sector investment in infrastructure, could be dramatically increased.

The BRIDGE Act, the bill I am working on with Senator BLUNT, establishes such an authority. It complements existing Federal programs scattered across several ages. It allows us to consolidate the expertise it takes to go against Wall Street in putting together infrastructure financing programs.

This new authority could provide an important new tool for State and local governments to partner with the private sector to invest in our Nation's infrastructure.

Let me be clear. Infrastructure financing alone isn't a silver bullet. If you finance, you have to pay those dollars back. But when we are looking at interest rates at record lows, failure to take advantage of accessing these private markets with interest rates at these low levels is the equivalent of political malfeasance. In terms of the BRIDGE Act, this program would complement existing programs such as TIFIA and WIFIA, which already provide good work.

My hope is that joining with Senator BLUNT and 12 of our colleagues—equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans—if not on this bill, we will act on the BRIDGE Act and provide this critically important needed infrastructure tool to our tool kit to make sure that our roads, bridges, airports, water and sewer systems are functioning and allow America to compete in the 21st century economy.

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. SCHUMER. 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. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I will be very brief. A number of us have clinics that serve our veterans population. I have one in Rochester. The Senator from Virginia has one in Hampton Roads, and there are others on both sides of the aisle where there is a potential problem because of the way CBO scored it. We have agreed that, rather than piggyback on the McCain amendment, we would figure out a bipartisan way to solve this problem in the NDAA bill. I very much appreciate the commitment of my friend from Arizona to help us solve that problem.

I know we will have the complete cooperation of our ranking member, Senator REED, and I look forward to trying to solve the problem for the benefit of veterans throughout the country who don't get the services they need, and we can move forward at least in 17 areas where they will.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). The Senator from Connecticut. Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, as the ranking member of the VA Committee, I want to join my colleague from New York, and having worked with Senator MCCAIN on this amendment, I am very pleased that the McCain-Blumenthal amendment has been made pending and that we have an agreement to authorize those VA leases that were requested over the last fiscal year when we turned to the National Defense Authorization Act.

I want to stress that these leases have been requested over the last several fiscal years, and this agreement embodies a situation that has to be addressed. I thank my colleague from Arizona for working with me on the amendment and now being so understanding on these requests, at least in committing to make sure that we address this very strongly felt need.

I also want to thank my colleague from Virginia for his work on this issue and for his work on the infrastructure spending measure that he has offered and that I have supported for years. I hope that we can get it done because the infrastructure of our Nation, as well as that of my State, requires that we commit the money as an investment. It is not funding. It is not spending. It is an investment in our future. We can't have a 21st century economy unless we have a 21st century infrastructure—roads, bridges, rail, airports. I am pleased and proud to join him in this effort.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

AMENDMENT NO. 3897

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, in a piece of legislation of this size, this scope, and this magnitude, there is always much to praise. Unfortunately, from time to time there is much to criticize.

Specifically, I rise today to try to correct one major mistake in this bill. As currently written, it permits the Department of Housing and Urban Development to proceed to the implementation of its radical new regulation, the insultingly misnamed affirmatively furthering fair housing rule, or AFFH.

Proponents of AFFH, including President Obama, claim that AFFH fulfills the original purpose and promise of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The truth is, HUD's new housing rule isn't the fulfillment but a betrayal of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. The purpose of the Fair Housing Act was to protect the God-given right of individuals and families, regardless of their skin color or their ethnicity, to buy and rent

homes where they please. By contrast, the explicit purpose of HUD's new rule is to empower Federal bureaucrats to dictate where a community's low-income residents will live. This is not what progress looks like.

AFFH not only grants unprecedented new powers to HUD—powers that were not contemplated and have no legitimate basis in the Fair Housing Act of 1968—but it will ultimately hurt the very people it purports to help—public housing residents, especially African-American public housing residents who too often find themselves trapped in dysfunctional, broken neighborhoods.

To make matters worse, this new rule will end America's unique and uniquely successful commitment to localism and diversity and make neighborhood-level construction decisions subject to the whims of future Presidents. If this past year has not yet done enough to give you pause about handing over such power to the executive branch, then you are not paying close enough attention.

I am offering an amendment today, No. 3897, that would prohibit HUD from using Federal taxpayer money to carry out the affirmatively furthering fair housing rule. The House of Representatives has already passed this amendment twice and will likely do so again in the near future. We should follow the lead of the House of Representatives in this regard.

Here is how the rule works. AFFH requires cities and towns across the country to audit their own local housing policies under close supervision by HUD regulators who may have never lived anywhere near the city, town, or municipality in question. If any aspect of a community's housing and demographic patterns fails to meet HUD bureaucrats' expansive definition of "fair housing," the local government must submit a plan to reorganize the community's housing practices according to the preferences and priorities set not by the community in question but by the bureaucrats—the bureaucrats in Washington, possibly hundreds or even thousands of miles away.

Critics of AFFH often say and I have said myself that this rule turns HUD into a sort of national zoning board with the power to unilaterally rewrite local zoning laws and land use regulations in every city and town in America. But that is not quite how the rule works, and that is why Senator COLLINS' amendment would not do anything to prevent the implementation of the very things we worry about with AFFH. In the 10 months since the rule was finalized, it has become clear that the mechanics of AFFH are much more underhanded and subversive than critics have often claimed. Under the new rule, HUD doesn't replace local housing authorities, it conscripts them into its service. This gets to the very heart of the difference between my amendment and the amendment offered by my distinguished colleague, the senior Senator from Maine, Ms. COLLINS.

The danger of AFFH is not that HUD will direct local governments and public housing authorities to make specific changes to their zoning policies; it will just threaten them by tying obedience to Federal community development block grants. Obedience to the commands of Federal regulators will be a conditional precedent of sorts to the ongoing receipt of Federal funds under the CDBG Program.

CDBG is a Federal grant program controlled by HUD, one that allocates some \$3 billion per year to local governments to help them address a variety of community development needs, including providing adequate and affordable public housing for their community. Traditionally, local officials have been more or less free to use their CDBG funds according to their own community's unique needs and specific priorities, but under AFFH, HUD officials will withhold local government CDBG funds unless that local government adopts HUD's preferred housing policies.

Predictably, proponents of the rule claim this will be a collaborative process, with local government officials in the driver's seat while the bureaucrats at HUD merely provide support and guidance, but the 10-month track record of AFFH suggests that precisely the opposite will be true. In fact, I have already heard from the housing authority of Salt Lake County, predicting that the cost of complying with AFFH will stretch their already thin resources, add hundreds of hours of bureaucratic paperwork to their workloads, and eliminate their autonomy to determine the best ways to provide adequate, low-cost housing to their community.

The problem with HUD's new rule has nothing to do with the stated intentions behind it. In a press release announcing the finalization of AFFH, HUD Secretary Julian Castro said: "Unfortunately, too many Americans find their dreams limited by where they come from, and a ZIP code should never determine a child's future." I completely agree. There is no disputing that the neighborhood in which a child grows up might affect his educational, social, and professional outcomes in the future. Nor is there any disagreement that far too many children today are raised in dysfunctional neighborhoods because it is the only place their parents can find affordable housing. The lack of affordable housing is not a new problem in America—just ask anyone who has ever had to pay rent in one of the major metropolitan areas controlled by the Democratic Party—but neither is the solution. The best way to make housing more affordable is to allow more housing to be built, and the best way to help low-income citizens find fair and affordable housing is to empower them to live in a neighborhood that meets their needs.

The history of Chicago is instructive here. In the 2000s, the Chicago city government demolished many of its public

housing facilities without any kind of a plan to replace them. Those with the resources and wherewithal to choose where to live moved to places where housing was cheap and economic opportunity was plentiful, but the less fortunate were relocated to more remote, less prosperous towns, towns like Dubuque, IA, at the behest of—who else?—the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In 2008 the city of Dubuque was struggling to meet the needs of its own public housing residents. Yet in stepped the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development declaring that the city's housing policies would fail to meet the agency's fair housing standards and that therefore the city would be ineligible to receive Federal funding from HUD unless the local government actively recruited Section 8 voucher holders from Chicago. Unwilling to lose access to Federal funding on which the city had come to rely, the small Iowa town acquiesced to HUD's demands—aggressive and unacceptable as they were. This imposed an enormous administrative burden on the city's resource-strapped housing agencies, but HUD's real victims were Chicago's public housing residents who were forcibly displaced to an unknown town 200 miles from the city they used to call home. Unless we pass this amendment to defund the disastrously misguided AFFH rule, this is what the future of public housing in America will look like.

I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this amendment and reaffirming that low-income families are not statistics to be managed by distant bureaucrats; they are human beings—our neighbors in need who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I listened very carefully to the presentation made by my colleague from Utah, Senator LEE, and I wish to respond to the concerns he raised. Indeed, if the picture he drew were accurate, I might be a supporter rather than an opponent of his amendment.

First, let me be clear that there is nothing in our bill that authorizes this rule. This rule was issued pursuant to HUD's normal regulatory authority in response to a report, which I will discuss in a moment, that was issued by the GAO, the Government Accountability Office.

The amendment offered by Senator LEE would prohibit funding for HUD's rule that is known as the affirmatively furthering fair housing rule. It was finalized in July of last year, but it is based on a requirement from the landmark civil rights-era law, the 1968 Fair Housing Act. That law mandates that HUD ensure that recipients of HUD funding not only prevent discrimination but also act to further the goals of fair housing that are outlined in this

landmark law. In fact, repeatedly over the years, Congress has reinforced this goal. As recently as 1998, the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act required HUD program recipients to affirmatively further fair housing.

When we talk about fair housing, it is important that we remember we are talking about not only prohibiting discrimination based on race but also discrimination based on disabilities, ethnic origin, and even against families with children. In fact, in fiscal year 2015, 56 percent of all reported complaints of housing discrimination were initiated by people with disabilities, and that is why so many organizations that are representing our disabled citizens are so strongly opposed and concerned about Senator LEE's amendment.

For example, the Paralyzed Veterans of America, an organization that was founded by servicemembers who returned home after World War II with spinal cord injury, believes that HUD's rule will help curb discrimination against people with disabilities, including our veterans and our seniors. According to the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the alarming trend of more than 50 percent of complaints about housing discrimination being initiated by individuals with disabilities will affect Americans returning from conflicts abroad, as well as a growing percentage of our seniors who are suffering from or living with disabilities. The organization also believes that HUD's rule will help local governments identify strategies and solutions to expand accessible and supportive housing choices for our seniors and our veterans.

I wish everyone had heard Senator ISAKSON's eloquent speech on the floor this afternoon when he talked about a wonderful, inclusive mixed-income housing development in Atlanta that has included a charter school and a Y. The children's test scores have gone up and crime has decreased because of the model that was adopted for this particular development.

Earlier I mentioned that it is important to know that HUD issued this new rule in response to a specific 2010 GAO report.

Members in this Chamber are always looking to GAO for information, advice, and recommendations on how we can improve the effectiveness and the efficiency of Federal programs to make sure they are fulfilling the mandates we have written and to make sure they are serving the people they are intended to serve in the manner Congress intended.

GAO took a look at the fair housing requirements and particularly the requirement in the Fair Housing Act that recipients of HUD's grants were to affirmatively advance fair housing. It was very critical of the haphazard nature of HUD's oversight and the fact that communities didn't know whether they were in compliance. There was

also a lack of tools, of community involvement, and of assessments to make sure those goals were being met.

Once HUD issued its final rule, the GAO was satisfied and closed out its recommendations. As the Presiding Officer is well aware, there are times when Federal agencies never implement GAO's recommendations, or take years to do so, and we in the Senate have to hammer the agencies over and over again on why they didn't implement GAO's recommendations. Well, in this case, HUD did so.

So not only was the origin of the rule the GAO report but also communities were seeking better tools and more guidance. Senator KAINE, a former mayor of Richmond and a former Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, was eloquent in describing the fact that he welcomed these rules because it was so hard when he was the mayor to know exactly how to accomplish the goal of affirmatively advancing fair housing. What exactly did that mean to HUD?

Indeed, there is an excellent article that appeared in *The Hill* today by the director of the PolicyLink Center for Infrastructure Equity and the co-director of the Promise Neighborhoods Institute that talked about the history of this rule. In particular—and I want to quote—the authors say:

The opposition ignores the fact that the rule was developed in response to city- and state-level requests for better tools and improved guidance; that it involved significant input from local-level innovators and experimenters; and that it was piloted in 74 regions nationwide over five years in the Sustainable Communities Initiative through a tool called the fair housing and equity assessment.

It lists cities across the country, including Salt Lake City, ironically; Denver, St. Paul, and Dallas, which have all invested in affordable housing, in transit-oriented developments to ensure that residents would have access to affordable transit and housing choices, just as examples.

So the idea that this rule came out of thin air is just not accurate. It is based on a law that has been on the books for decades—a law that is a landmark civil rights-era law—the 1968 Fair Housing Act. It is based on a GAO report in 2010 which said HUD wasn't doing a good job. It is based on requests from States and communities for more tools and more guidance from HUD.

So this rule was not developed by our committee. It was not authorized by our committee. It comes from the 1968 law which, as I said, has been reaffirmed in at least three subsequent laws that this body has passed. It comes from a GAO report, and it involved a lot of input.

Now, according to Senator LEE, and we heard him speak about it today, he fears HUD is going to be turned into—I believe he called it a national zoning authority for every neighborhood, and Federal bureaucrats thousands of miles away in Washington will be in charge of our local communities.

First, let me say I do not believe that to be the case, and I believe it is a

misreading of the guidance. However, I would never want that either. That is why, along with my colleagues Senator JACK REED and Senator THAD COCHRAN, we have introduced an amendment to ensure that HUD cannot do that, to prohibit HUD from being involved in local zoning decisions so the recipients of Federal dollars will continue to make their own local decisions to address the Federal requirements.

Because there has been so much misrepresentation about our amendment, let me read to my colleagues exactly what it says. It couldn't be more clear: None—none—of the funds made available by this act may be used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to “direct a grantee to undertake specific change to existing zoning laws as part of carrying out” the final rule entitled “affirmatively furthering fair housing.”

I don't know how the amendment could be any clearer than that. We have made sure the worst fear, the worst scenario the sponsor of this amendment has conjured up, cannot occur if our amendment passes.

On the other hand, I want to point out what Senator LEE's amendment would do. It would prevent HUD from providing the necessary technical assistance, guidance, and help that localities have continuously asked HUD to provide to ensure that they don't get sued, that they are not susceptible to costly and unnecessary fair housing litigation brought by individuals or outside groups. They want HUD's help, but under the Lee amendment no funding could be used to give them that kind of help. I don't see how that makes sense. That is how broadly written his amendment is.

I want to correct something else that was said. Senator LEE talked about the enormous burden this rule will impose on the recipients of HUD funds. To be clear, the rule requires the recipients to complete the fair housing analysis only once every 5 years—once every 5 years—similar to all other HUD requirements in their consolidated plans. So that argument, in my judgment, also falls.

Let me say that we are all aware of concerns, despite the tremendous progress that has been made in this country, about the lack of progress in providing housing opportunities to all Americans. That is why in our bill we try to deal with homeless veterans—we do deal with homeless veterans. We put in \$57 million for additional vouchers for homeless veterans, even though the administration wanted to eliminate that important program. We are continuing to work on that.

Finally, let me respond to a specific case that Senator LEE mentioned involving Chicago and Dubuque. To begin with, it is simply a mistake in a statement to say that Chicago residents were “forced to relocate to Dubuque.” That is just not accurate. It is true that this is a Federal voucher program and, as Republicans, we usually like

vouchers because we want Americans to have choices about where they live. So the section 8 program, for example, which is a voucher-based program, doesn't say that you can only use it in Portland, ME, or Providence, RI, or Salt Lake City, UT, or Chicago, IL. It is a program that allows people to live where they want to live, but it is a program with a long waiting list in most cities. Nothing—also, despite what has been written—nothing in the rule requires that Dubuque be considered part of Chicago. That is not a statement that the sponsor of the amendment made today, but it is a statement that has been circulated by some outside groups and it is simply ridiculous. It is absolutely absurd.

The concerns raised with Dubuque are related to a settlement that the city reached with HUD in 2013, which was well before this rule was finalized. The agreement was the result of a compliance review under the Civil Rights Act—title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs receiving assistance. Sadly, the city of Dubuque was found to not be in compliance with the Civil Rights Act because the city was purging and closing wait lists for the section 8 voucher program and creating residency requirements that are not allowed. Indeed, it is sad to say, in the letter of finding, HUD wrote: “The City of Dubuque knew its actions would limit or deny the participation of African Americans in its Section 8 program.” I would hope we could all agree—I am sure we could all agree—that is just wrong.

So the Dubuque case, rather than being an example of the bizarre consequences of this rule, as has been portrayed, is in fact yet another reminder that even in this day and age there continue to be some clear violations of the Fair Housing Act.

I hope my colleagues will join me in voting against Senator LEE's amendment. I am sure he is well-intentioned, but the effects of this amendment would be very harmful to the goals we all share of fair housing in America.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise to support my colleague, the chairman of the subcommittee, Senator COLLINS of Maine, in opposition to the amendment offered by the Senator from Utah. This amendment would prohibit HUD from implementing or enforcing its Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing regulations.

I think it is important to remind everyone of the reasoning for and history behind these regulations. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 was enacted because banks, landlords, and developers were excluding people from buying or renting in certain neighborhoods based on race. Under the Fair Housing Act, communities are required to take steps to further fair housing in order to prevent discrimination and segregation.

I think we have come a long way since 1968, and I don't think anyone is arguing the premise, purpose, or beneficial aspects of the Fair Housing Act. The law is based on trying to ensure that Americans have fair access to housing, no matter their race, physical ability, family status, or religion.

People should be able to live according to their own choice and resources. I hope that we can all agree that people should not be turned away from a home or neighborhood because of their religion, family status, disability, or race. Frankly, that was the aspiration in 1968 and still, too often, remains an aspiration. HUD is trying to give local communities the tools and resources needed to live up to the legislative mandate that we imposed and continue to impose.

As the chairman said so well, these regulations don't emanate from some person in a room thinking a great thought. In 2010, the Government Accountability Office did an audit to assess compliance with the Fair Housing Act. That is the GAO's job. That office checks whether Federal agencies are doing what we—the Congress—tell them to do. GAO found that many HUD grantees did not analyze impediments to fair housing—that we were giving money to organizations throughout this country and that they were not even making attempts to analyze the impediments that existed to fair housing.

GAO also found that those organizations that did analyze impediments to fair housing often failed to establish any goals or objectives to address them. The organizations just found them and did not act. That is not what the Fair Housing Act requires.

GAO also found that HUD was unable to determine if a community was actually meeting its obligations under the Fair Housing Act. HUD simply did not know whether the requirements of the Fair Housing Act were being implemented at the local level.

HUD is often criticized for not effectively responding to GAO, but here they responded. HUD developed regulations that insist that grantees conduct a fair housing analysis and submit that assessment to HUD for review.

As a result of this proposed regulation, HUD went through a 2-year rule-making process. This was not some whimsical spur-of-the-moment decision or press release to say: Let's do this.

The process was 2 years long, fully open to public hearing, comment and review, and susceptible to challenge in court if it did not measure up to the Administrative Procedure Act or the Fair Housing Act. This process has resulted in regulations that will actually carry out the intent of the Congress.

To reinforce and clarify what the chairman has said, these regulations do not change existing law and do not in any way dictate local zoning decisions. In fact, these regulations simplify the responsibility of grantees to comply with the Fair Housing Act because

they give grantees the data and tools to help communities comply with the law.

These regulations do not require grantees to gather new data because HUD provides the data to them. To help communities comply with the Fair Housing Act, HUD is working closely with grantees, providing technical assistance, and holding training sessions across the country. This is a collaborative effort. It is an effort that does not dictate a national outcome. HUD is helping localities, working with their particular situation, to develop a response to the legislative requirements that we have been emphatically insisting upon since 1968.

We are also working, as we should, to ensure that this process is continually evaluated by HUD, and streamlined and simplified—particularly, when it comes to dealing with small communities that cannot bear the administrative overhead that some larger cities might be able to bear. HUD is providing assistance to ensure that these grantees are complying with the Fair Housing Act.

We all understand—and this principle applies not just to HUD programs, but every program—that grantees have an obligation to use Federal resources responsibly and consistently with legal requirements. The Fair Housing Act requires that access to housing not be denied because of race, disability, or other protected category. This is what we should expect for all recipients of Federal support—that they follow the law.

This improved process, in my view, protects communities and ensures that they still have a choice of how they meet their obligations under the Fair Housing Act. There is nothing in these regulations that undermines the ability of a local community to determine these solutions, but these communities must recognize their responsibilities. Their solutions are ones that will be organic to the community—what works for them, given the objective of ensuring that there are no artificial impediments to access housing.

It is also important to note that, if HUD is prevented from implementing these regulations, there is no change to the obligations that these communities have under the Fair Housing Act. This law has been in place for 48 years. Those requirements will still remain in place and will not only be opportunities, but also obligations to take action in certain cases.

Senator KAINE was on the floor this morning stating that, as a young lawyer in Richmond, VA, he became an advocate for fair housing because people came to him with complaints, and he took those complaints to court. What we are trying to do, interestingly enough, is to avoid all of that by having a process where the impediments have been removed by a local solution.

The amendment that Senator LEE proposes would prevent HUD from satisfying these GAO recommendations to

provide guidance, clarity, and support for these grantees. This amendment makes grantees liable for compliance without the tools and data needed to comply. Ironically, it probably puts grantees in a worse position.

So I join the chairman and urge all of my colleagues to reject this amendment.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I want to express my strong support for the 2017 Transportation and Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill. Senator COLLINS and Senator REED deserve tremendous credit for their leadership on this bipartisan bill.

Congress has the basic responsibility to determine how we spend hard-earned taxpayer dollars. It is a responsibility that my colleagues and I on the Appropriations Committee take very seriously. Debating and passing these annual bills provides accountability. It is an important part of setting priorities, making choices, and reducing waste.

Last week, the Senate passed an energy and water appropriations bill crafted by Senators ALEXANDER and FEINSTEIN. While I don't serve on their subcommittee, I was very proud to support their bill, and I congratulate them on moving forward and making the process work.

The 2017 Transportation and HUD appropriations bill is the latest example of the Senate's return to regular order. This process enables all Senators to play an active role in the legislative process and to address concerns that are important to their States. This bill is crafted with bipartisan support, and it helps to drive the growth of our Nation. Senators COLLINS and REED have put in a lot of work to prepare this bill for consideration, as have both of their staffs. The discretionary spending in this bill is within the budget caps, and it reflects a responsible approach. The bill strengthens our country's infrastructure and transportation system.

This week is recognized as Infrastructure Week, and I have heard from several Arkansans that this must remain a priority. Our citizens have opportunities, and our Nation is a powerful economic force, thanks in part to our roads and bridges, airports, waterways, and related structures. We need to maintain our roads because they provide a reliable way to move goods and services around the country and, with the rest of our infrastructure, to countries around the world. These investments lead to job creation and greatly benefit our economy.

The bill provides critical funding to modernize air traffic control. While our current system is second to none in safety, the FAA must accelerate its progress toward operating a more efficient system. A modern air traffic control system will be more convenient for travelers, it will save money, and it will clean the environment by reducing the amount of fuel used by aircraft.

The bill provides critical funding to improve air traffic certification services. These improvements can help aircraft manufacturers, including those in Arkansas, that are fighting to win in a competitive global market.

The bill provides critical highway funding that is consistent with the long-term highway bill we passed last year under the leadership of Senators INHOFE and BOXER. I am pleased that this bill includes a provision I offered to empower the State to designate a portion of Highway 67 in Arkansas, from North Little Rock to Walnut Ridge, as "Future I-57." Arkansas has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to build an interstate-quality road, and we are now calling it what it is. The presence of an official interstate highway is one of the initial key factors that developers consider when determining where to make major investments such as building new factories.

Community leaders along this stretch of road shared their excitement about the future designation. Buck Layne, executive director for the Searcy Regional Chamber of Commerce, says this will improve the transportation network and expand economic development opportunities.

Jon Chadwell, executive director for the Newport Economic Development Commission, says this will open up opportunities to Arkansas business and give companies an even greater access to national and global markets.

Walnut Ridge mayor Charles Snapp says this designation will open a lot of doors, and Walnut Ridge aldermen voted this week to support this designation.

Resolutions of support for the I-57 designation have been passed by the Newport Economic Development Commission, as well as the chambers of commerce in Bald Knob, Cabot, Jacksonville, Lawrence County, Newport, Sherwood, and Searcy. Other expressions of support will be received in communities throughout the central Arkansas and northeast Arkansas regions.

This designation is an important step to make Arkansas a better connected State that is open for business. This bill also sets high priorities and provides critical funding through programs like community development block grants. These programs work because they allow decisions to be made at the local community level.

I appreciate the efforts to make sure rural States like Arkansas are not left behind by housing and development programs.

I compliment the chair and ranking member on working to address Member priorities under these programs.

We are also jointly considering the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill. Senators KIRK and TESTER have worked very hard to put together a good package for the Senate to debate. Their bill funds the VA at record levels and invests in priorities such as veterans health care, benefit claims

processing, the Board of Veterans' Appeals, and the VA inspector general, as well as prosthetic research. It includes funding for projects to ensure military readiness and improve the quality of life for our military families.

I grew up in a military family, and I have been honored to serve on the Veterans' Affairs Committee since my first day in the House of Representatives. The needs of veterans are very important to me, and I am proud to support the work that Senator KIRK and Senator TESTER have done to provide funding for 2017. These are funding and policy priorities for both sides of the aisle.

I encourage my colleagues to support this legislation because it creates an environment that helps grow our economy, reins in spending, and takes care of our veterans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I would like to recognize the work of the chairman and ranking member on the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Subcommittee for their good work on this very important appropriations bill.

I recognize that, while we haven't had a multiple series of votes on amendments on this bill, I know the floor managers have been working aggressively to process amendments and make this appropriations bill—not only the T-HUD bill but also the MILCON bill—a good appropriations measure. So I thank my colleagues for their respective efforts, and I am pleased to see us processing appropriations bills here on the Senate floor.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. President, I wish to take a few minutes this evening to talk about the Affordable Care Act and some of the impacts that we are seeing in my State of Alaska. We referred to this as the ACA, the Affordable Care Act, but most of the folks, when I talk to them back home, call it the "un-Affordable Care Act" because we are not seeing how it is making health care insurance—any kind of care—more affordable.

Last year, nationally, we saw a dozen co-ops fail that were created by the ACA, which literally threw people into turmoil, leaving in question if they had any insurance at all.

UnitedHealth, one of the largest providers in the country, has been forced off the exchanges in numerous States.

Just last week we had the news back home that Moda Health was going to be withdrawing from the Alaska market in 2017. What that means is that we will be a State with only one option in the individual market next year. So what that means for the some 14,000 Alaskans who are currently on a Moda plan is that they are going to be forced to change insurers next year. But I guess it is an easy choice when you only have a choice of one on the individual market there.

Then, of course, just last week we saw signs that the administration's

payments of the cost-share reduction were unconstitutional. So we can only assume that is going to further exacerbate problems.

This week in the Wall Street Journal, there was an article about the ever-shrinking market for rural areas. The article mentioned a small business owner in Kodiak, AK, a bookkeeper, who is worrying about what the price of premiums will be when you are left with only one option. She made this statement:

It's going to be a monopoly, basically; "here's the price, take it or leave it."

That is what happens when you have just one.

As the market continues to fail in other States, we are seeing other States lose their options as well. Alabama and Wyoming are also now left with only one choice. More States may be facing this in the near future.

The Wall Street Journal article goes on to point out that the "patchwork of coverage reflects continued instability in the individual market as companies shift their geographic footprints to avoid areas that have turned out to generate steep losses and focus on places that they believe that they can get their ACA business into the black."

So what that means for States like Alaska that are very rural and that have some of the highest health care costs in the Nation: We are just not attractive enough to foster competition. At the end of the day, who suffers? It is the Alaskans. It is those who are seeking the care.

The administration says the market just needs to "stabilize and evolve," but what about this bookkeeper in Kodiak? What about the educators out there? What about parents who are left wondering: What do we do in the meantime?

It used to be that the Federal Government broke up monopolies and worked to foster competition in order to benefit consumers, but now what we are seeing at least playing out in my State is, through bad law and failed policies, we see that same government creating de facto monopolies in the individual marketplace.

I find it deeply troubling that as these health insurance options continue to shrink, any hope of curbing the rapid increase of premium rates also disappears. We are constantly asked by our constituents: Are my premiums going to continue to increase? We are talking about monthly premiums in the State of Alaska amounting to \$3,000 a month for a family. Think about that. That is not affordable in anybody's book. It is not beyond the realm of possibility given what we have already seen. Last year in Alaska, between Moda and Premera, the two that are covering on the individual market, the increases were over 30 percent, somewhere between 32 and 35 percent increases over the previous year.

I have been on the floor, and I have shared stories of hard-working Alaskans who are paying a couple of thousand dollars a month for the cheapest bronze plan that is available on the exchange. I have spoken about how the ACA has been called the single greatest threat to quality public education. The reason for that is our school districts are being faced with hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines under the Cadillac test when it is imposed. I have relayed stories from employers who are saying: I can't afford to expand my business. I won't expand my business because of the employer mandate—harming not only the businesses but the workers themselves.

The bottom line, and I hear it from all corners of the State, is that the ACA is not working for us in Alaska.

I had a group of Realtors from around the State visit me in my office here last week. One woman in the group said that she was paying \$2,500 a month. She has a family of four. She has a \$6,000 deductible for her coverage. She said: You know, it is really hard for us to keep making these payments every month. They don't qualify for the subsidy.

I talked to another young family from Eagle River who was forced to switch from Premiera to Moda after the ACA passed because the premium increases were not sustainable, and even then, when they switched, they were paying \$1,200 a month with a \$10,000 deductible. So what happens when you have a deductible like that? You put off that health care.

But think about it. It just makes it so hard to run a business. It makes it so hard to pay for your day-to-day experiences.

Worse yet, for that family from Eagle River, they went from Premiera to Moda because their premiums were too high. Now Moda is leaving, so they have to go back to the insurer that was too high before. This family is scrambling. What are they going to do? How are they going to be able to afford insurance in the future?

As the costs continue to rise, these small businesses are wondering: How long do we keep our doors open if these costs continue at these rates?

In Anchorage, a couple who has Moda has been paying \$2,500 a month, with a \$10,000 deductible—an increase of \$1,000 a month over their premiums for last year. Now they are going to be switching to the only company on the individual market in 2017. They are going to see yet another increase.

A woman in Anchorage whom we talked to has watched year after year as her rates increased from \$500 a month to nearly \$2,000 a month. She is basically holding her breath for what the 2017 premiums rates will hold. We don't know yet in Alaska. Because of the announcement from Moda, we are not sure what the increase will be coming from the other insurer.

More and more, I am hearing from folks who say that they feel it is just

cheaper to simply not buy insurance, to pay the tax penalty and then hope and pray that nobody in the family gets sick. Hoping to not get sick is not a health plan. As more and more Alaskans are dropping out, costs for those who stay in go up, driving more to drop out, and you have this death spiral within the system.

The deeper we get into life under the ACA, the deeper Alaskans fall into a hole. The ACA has failed the people of our State. This one-size-fits-all approach rarely works for a State as diverse as Alaska. It certainly has not worked in the realm of health insurance.

This is not the only place where we are seeing the law failing. There is more that needs to be done to make the Affordable Care Act work for rural parts of the country that have specialized needs thanks to higher medical costs, lack of access, and now fewer insurance options.

We in Congress need to take a serious look at the trends we have seen and work on solutions that will provide the flexibility that is needed for the States to make a difference when it comes to access to affordable care.

I have consistently supported full repeal of the ACA. I voted to do so on several occasions now. But I have also recognized that it was going to be difficult, if not impossible, in this administration to do so. But I have supported steps that will reduce the burdens of the ACA and I think work to address some of the most harmful provisions in the law. One example is full repeal of the Cadillac tax I just mentioned. The Cadillac tax will only worsen conditions in Alaska, with nearly 62 percent of customers who will be facing that tax if the Cadillac tax were to be implemented. Again, I repeat, in our State, not only are our health care costs so high, but our insurance costs are so high.

Whether you are in what would be considered a Cadillac plan because of the benefits or it is just because you are paying so much for it, it is assumed that those benefits are good. Sixty-two percent of the folks in Alaska would be impacted by this tax. It is a prime example of the ACA hurting small, rural States, because so many of us have more expensive health care due to the remoteness and due to our lower population size. Then those States are forced to take money away from things, like our school districts, where they are trying to put the money into public education, into other services, to pay for the cost. So our State suffers, boroughs suffer, our schools suffer, and our Alaskan families suffer.

As we look to the end of this administration and looking to next year, I would hope that we can seriously address the problem that the ACA has created for so many areas of our country.

For rural States like Alaska, the approach to health care needs to focus on more than forcing people to just buy

insurance and, unfortunately, buy expensive insurance. We need to work to find solutions to these issues, whether it be through the creation of a nationwide insurance pool so that policies are not limited to one State, as they are currently. Right now, as I say, Alaska is not a very attractive market. We have small numbers. We have high costs. Who is going to come? How are we going to get a greater pool?

We need to look more critically at how we improve the cost of transparency of medical procedures. We need to look critically at these special enrollment periods and see if people are finding loopholes that allow them to game the system.

Expanding both health savings and flexible spending accounts will allow people to save what they think they should and make the choices for themselves instead of the government forcing things on individuals.

When we think about those areas where we can save money through not spending it in the first place—an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure—we should be incentivizing people to live healthier lifestyles in order to prevent and bring down the incidence of chronic disease. Type 2 diabetes—largely preventable through lifestyle changes—costs an estimated \$176 billion a year. Obesity-related illnesses cost an estimated \$190 billion a year. A recent study found that a 10-percent drop in smokers could save \$63 billion in health care costs per year. It makes zero sense to be paying providers to treat these problems after they have arisen rather than trying to focus on the front end, paying for lifestyle changes and case management that would significantly reduce the cost of treating these diseases.

I have been working to find solutions that will help support Alaska's rural needs, especially those related to access and workforce development because if we can improve the overall access to treatment and options to medical providers, we then take steps to reduce the cost of medical procedures.

I have supported the Family Health Care Accessibility Act that will improve the care provided by community health centers by enabling them to utilize volunteer primary care providers. Community health centers—I think so many of us recognize the benefits and the crucial role they serve in meeting the needs of rural and underserved communities, allowing patients to receive local treatment instead of being forced to travel far from home for treatment.

Steps like these that help to improve access are just some of the ways I think we should be rethinking our approach to health care in the broader sense as we seek to alleviate the burdens that have been imposed by the ACA.

I have continued over several Congresses now to introduce the Medicare Patient Empowerment Act. This is legislation that would give patients the

option to negotiate with their provider. Medicare would pay the typical fee the patient negotiates for the difference there, but we face a very unique situation in our State. Again, a one-size-fits-all prescription doesn't work for us. We have incredibly low reimbursement rates for Medicare in Alaska, so you have very few providers that will accept Medicare. When you are newly Medicare eligible or you come into the State, it is tough to find anybody who will see you.

If there is some flexibility to negotiate prices, what we are trying to do with this bill is cut through the red-tape, allow Medicare beneficiaries to benefit from increased access, and enable patients to have the relationships they have built with their physicians. We have a very fast-rising senior population in the State, and it is going to be increasingly important to make sure they have the option to seek the care they need.

I do not support compulsory health insurance but do believe individuals with preexisting conditions should receive care. As we discuss these important issues in the Senate, I continue to work to address—again—these issues that have presented themselves with implementation of the ACA. So working to a place where we fully repeal and replace the ACA is where we need to be.

There have been several Republican proposals that would not only replace this unworkable law but replace it with consumer-based reforms. Senator BURR of North Carolina, Senator HATCH of Utah, and Senator CASSIDY of Louisiana all have been working on important measures that take steps to get us to a place where what we are talking about is affordable health care, a reality that works for all Americans, whether you are in Alaska or you are in North Carolina.

Obviously, there is much work in front of us. Again, it is important to recognize the frustration so many are feeling as they are seeing their costs increase, their access going nowhere, and let them know we continue to work on these very difficult issues. Alaskans deserve it. Americans deserve it.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

MEMORIAL FOR FALLEN EDUCATORS

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I wish to speak for just a few moments about the Memorial for Fallen Educators in conjunction with the National Teachers Hall of Fame located on the campus of Emporia State University in Emporia, KS.

When someone asks the question, "Other than your family, name a person who has made a difference in your life," the answer has never been my Senator, my Congressman. More often the response is a teacher. That answer speaks volumes about the influence of an educator on the lives of young people. Teachers fulfill a variety of roles

by encouraging our children, instilling values, and challenging them. Too often we take this profession for granted, and the people who make education possible are teachers.

Each one of us remembers a teacher. We remember in the first grade or second grade when they helped us sound out the big words or guided our hands as we struggled to make out the shapes of letters.

We remember the middle school teacher or the gym teacher who taught us how to spike the volleyball or sink the winning hoop while playing in the playoffs. We remember the high school science teacher who helped us dissect frogs or build a box made of toothpicks that would protect the egg as it dropped from a two-story building.

Our teachers are our friends, our mentors, and our role models. The lessons they teach us stick with us for a long time after we have left their classrooms. Their jobs are never done, and educators know that often the last ringing bell of the afternoon, rather than signaling the end of their workday, begins the beginning of a new kind of work—grading homework, tutoring individual students, or prepping for the next day's lesson plan.

Educators work round-the-clock on behalf of the kids they instruct. They take on a job that requires more hours than there are in the day because they believe in their students and because they know how crucial their efforts are in seeing these students succeed. I believe we change the world one person at a time, and it happens in classrooms across Kansas and around the country every day.

Teachers often forfeit material gain for the thrill of seeing a student's eyes light up when they discover a new concept or grasp a new idea. Teachers have long understood they truly shape the world by their work, and their greatest product is an educated society.

Unfortunately, each day teachers walk into their classrooms they are also subject to threats of bullying or violence. Far too many educators have lost their lives in the line of their professional duty. Teachers have been killed at the hands of students, and many have been killed protecting their students from adults perpetrating violent acts.

To honor these slain teachers, the National Teachers Hall of Fame, under the leadership of the director, Carol Strickland, created the Memorial for Fallen Educators. The memorial, which was dedicated 2 years ago at Emporia State University, stands alongside the National Teachers Hall of Fame. I had the honor of visiting the site last September.

Already built and paid for, the memorial lists the names of educators across the country since 1764 who have lost their lives while working with students. It is owned and cared for by the National Teachers Hall of Fame and Emporia State University.

I introduced legislation last year that would designate the Memorial for

Fallen Educators as a national memorial. The more than 100 fallen teachers whose names are etched in marble taught in schools across the country. As a nation, together we should recognize the incredible sacrifices they each made because of their dedication to educating young people—their dedication to caring, loving, and protecting young people.

This legislation has no cost to the taxpayer and private funds will be used to maintain the memorial. It simply brings the site—the only one in the United States dedicated to fallen educators—the national prestige it merits.

As the Senate considers the national memorials proposed for designation, I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting this worthy tribute to our fallen teachers. Anyone who has ever been inspired by an educator should visit the memorial and recognize and remember those honorable lives which have been lost.

Mr. President, 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.

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

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

AMENDMENTS NOS. 3967, 3962, 4011, 4024, AND 4042 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3896

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up en bloc and reported by number: amendment No. 3967, submitted by Senator PAUL; amendment No. 3992, submitted by Senator JOHNSON; amendment No. 4011, submitted by Senator NELSON; amendment No. 4024, submitted by Senator ISAKSON; and amendment No. 4042, submitted by Senator WARNER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the amendments en bloc by number.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Maine [Ms. COLLINS], for others, proposes amendments numbered 3967, 3992, 4011, 4024, and 4042 to amendment No. 3896.

The amendments are as follows:

AMENDMENT NO. 3967

(Purpose: To provide for the identification of certain high priority corridors on the National Highway System and to include and designate certain route segments on the Interstate System)

On page 41, strike lines 12 through 25 and insert the following:

“(89) United States Route 67 from Interstate 40 in North Little Rock, Arkansas, to United States Route 412.

“(90) The Edward T. Breathitt Parkway from Interstate 24 to Interstate 69.”.

(b) INCLUSION OF CERTAIN ROUTE SEGMENTS ON INTERSTATE SYSTEM.—Section 1105(e)(5)(A) of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 is

amended in the first sentence by striking “and subsection (c)(83)” and inserting “subsection (c)(83), subsection (c)(89), and subsection (c)(90)”.

(c) DESIGNATION.—Section 1105(e)(5)(C)(i) of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 is amended by adding at the end the following: “The route referred to in subsection (c)(89) is designated as Interstate Route I-57. The route referred to in subsection (c)(90) is designated as Interstate Route I-169.”.

AMENDMENT NO. 3992

(Purpose: To ensure timely access for Inspectors General to records, documents, and other materials)

At the appropriate place in division A, insert the following:

SEC. _____. (a) None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to deny an Inspector General funded under this Act timely access to any records, documents, or other materials available to the department or agency over which that Inspector General has responsibilities under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), or to prevent or impede that Inspector General's access to such records, documents, or other materials, under any provision of law, except a provision of law that expressly refers to the Inspector General and expressly limits the Inspector General's right of access.

(b) A department or agency covered by this section shall provide its Inspector General with access to all such records, documents, and other materials in a timely manner.

(c) Each Inspector General shall ensure compliance with statutory limitations on disclosure relevant to the information provided by the establishment over which that Inspector General has responsibilities under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.).

(d) Each Inspector General covered by this section shall report to the Committees on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Senate within 5 calendar days any failures to comply with this requirement.

AMENDMENT NO. 4011

(Purpose: To ensure the safety of properties covered under a housing assistance payment contract)

In division A, strike section 225 and insert the following:

SEC. 225. (a) Any entity receiving housing assistance payments shall maintain decent, safe, and sanitary conditions, as determined by the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (in this section referred to as the “Secretary”), and comply with any standards under applicable State or local laws, rules, ordinances, or regulations relating to the physical condition of any property covered under a housing assistance payment contract.

(b) The Secretary shall take action under subsection (c) when a multifamily housing project with a section 8 contract or contract for similar project-based assistance—

(1) receives a Uniform Physical Condition Standards (UPCS) score of 30 or less;

(2) fails to certify in writing to the Secretary within 3 days that all Exigent Health and Safety deficiencies identified by the inspector at the project have been corrected; or

(3) receives a UPCS score between 31 and 59 and has received consecutive scores of less than 60 on UPCS inspections.

Such requirements shall apply to insured and noninsured projects with assistance attached to the units under section 8 of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437f), but do not apply to such units assisted under section 8(o)(13) (42 U.S.C. 1437f(o)(13))

or to public housing units assisted with capital or operating funds under section 9 of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437g).

(c)(1) The Secretary shall notify the owner and provide an opportunity for response within 15 days after the results of the UPCS inspection are issued. If the violations remain, the Secretary shall develop a plan to bring the property into compliance within 30 days after the results of the UPCS inspection are issued and must provide the owner with a Notice of Default with a specified timetable, determined by the Secretary, for correcting all deficiencies. The Secretary must also provide a copy of the Notice of Default to the tenants, the local government, any mortgagees, and any contract administrator. If the owner's appeal results in a UPCS score of 60 or above, the Secretary may withdraw the Notice of Default.

(2) At the end of the time period for correcting all deficiencies specified in the Notice of Default, if the owner fails to fully correct such deficiencies, the Secretary may—

(A) require immediate replacement of project management with a management agent approved by the Secretary;

(B) impose civil money penalties, which shall be used solely for the purpose of supporting safe and sanitary conditions at applicable properties, as designated by the Secretary, with priority given to the tenants of the property affected by the penalty;

(C) abate the section 8 contract, including partial abatement, as determined by the Secretary, until all deficiencies have been corrected;

(D) pursue transfer of the project to an owner, approved by the Secretary under established procedures, which will be obligated to promptly make all required repairs and to accept renewal of the assistance contract as long as such renewal is offered;

(E) transfer the existing section 8 contract to another project or projects and owner or owners;

(F) pursue exclusionary sanctions, including suspensions or debarments from Federal programs;

(G) seek judicial appointment of a receiver to manage the property and cure all project deficiencies or seek a judicial order of specific performance requiring the owner to cure all project deficiencies;

(H) work with the owner, lender, or other related party to stabilize the property in an attempt to preserve the property through compliance, transfer of ownership, or an infusion of capital provided by a third-party that requires time to effectuate; or

(I) take any other regulatory or contractual remedies available as deemed necessary and appropriate by the Secretary.

(d) The Secretary shall also take appropriate steps to ensure that project-based contracts remain in effect, subject to the exercise of contractual abatement remedies to assist relocation of tenants for major threats to health and safety after written notice to and informed consent of the affected tenants and use of other remedies set forth above. To the extent the Secretary determines, in consultation with the tenants and the local government, that the property is not feasible for continued rental assistance payments under such section 8 or other programs, based on consideration of (1) the costs of rehabilitating and operating the property and all available Federal, State, and local resources, including rent adjustments under section 524 of the Multifamily Assisted Housing Reform and Affordability Act of 1997 (“MAHRAA”) and (2) environmental conditions that cannot be remedied in a cost-effective fashion, the Secretary may, in consultation with the tenants of that property, contract for project-based rental assistance payments

with an owner or owners of other existing housing properties, or provide other rental assistance.

(e) The Secretary shall report quarterly on all properties covered by this section that are assessed through the Real Estate Assessment Center and have UPCS physical inspection scores of less than 60 or have received an unsatisfactory management and occupancy review within the past 36 months. The report shall include—

(1) the enforcement actions being taken to address such conditions, including imposition of civil money penalties and termination of subsidies, and identify properties that have such conditions multiple times;

(2) actions that the Department of Housing and Urban Development is taking to protect tenants of such identified properties; and

(3) any administrative or legislative recommendations to further improve the living conditions at properties covered under a housing assistance payment contract.

AMENDMENT NO. 4024

(Purpose: To direct the Secretary of Transportation to issue a final rule requiring the use of speed limiting devices on heavy trucks not later than 6 months after the date of the enactment of this Act)

In division A, on page 49, between lines 6 and 7, insert the following:

SEC. 142. Not later than 6 months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Transportation shall issue a final rule requiring the use of speed limiting devices on trucks with a gross vehicle weight rating in excess of 26,000 pounds.

AMENDMENT NO. 4042

(Purpose: To provide additional funds for the National Park Service for certain projects)

On page 37, between lines 17 and 18, insert the following:

SEC. 122. (a) TRANSFER OF AMOUNTS.—

(1) STATE OF VIRGINIA.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Of the total amount apportioned to the State of Virginia under section 104 of title 23, United States Code, for fiscal year 2017, the Secretary of Transportation shall, by the later of November 30, 2016, or 30 days after the enactment of this Act, transfer to the National Park Service—

(i) an amount equal to—

(I) \$30,000,000; multiplied by

(II) the ratio that—

(aa) the amount apportioned to the State of Virginia under such section 104; bears to

(bb) the combined amount apportioned to the State of Virginia and the District of Columbia under such section 104; and

(ii) an amount of obligation limitation equal to the amount calculated under clause (i).

(B) SOURCE AND AMOUNT.—For purpose of the transfer under subparagraph (A), the State of Virginia shall select at the discretion of the State—

(i) the programs (among those for which funding is apportioned as described in that subparagraph) from which to transfer the amount specified in that subparagraph; and

(ii) the amount to transfer from each of those programs (equal in aggregate to the amount calculated under subparagraph (A)(i)).

(2) DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Of the total amount apportioned to the District of Columbia under section 104 of title 23, United States Code, for fiscal year 2017, the Secretary of Transportation shall, by the later of November 30, 2016, or 30 days after the enactment of this Act, transfer to the National Park Service—

(i) an amount equal to—

(I) \$30,000,000; multiplied by

(II) the ratio that—

(aa) the amount apportioned to the District of Columbia under such section 104; bears to

(bb) the combined amount apportioned to the State of Virginia and the District of Columbia under such section 104; and

(ii) an amount of obligation limitation equal to the amount calculated under clause (i).

(B) SOURCE AND AMOUNT.—For purpose of the transfer under subparagraph (A), the District of Columbia shall select at the discretion of the District—

(i) the programs (among those for which funding is apportioned as described in that subparagraph) from which to transfer the amount specified in that subparagraph; and

(ii) the amount to transfer from each of those programs (equal in aggregate to the amount calculated under subparagraph (A)(i)).

(3) FEDERAL LANDS TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM.—Of the amounts otherwise made available to the National Park Service under section 203 of title 23, United States Code, not less than 10 percent shall be set aside for purposes of this section.

(b) ELIGIBILITY AND FEDERAL SHARE.—The amounts under subsection (a) shall be—

(1) available to the National Park Service only for projects that—

(A) are eligible under section 203 of title 23, United States Code;

(B) are located on bridges on the National Highway System that were originally constructed before 1945 and are in poor condition; and

(C) each have an estimated total project cost of not less than \$150,000,000; and

(2) subject to the Federal share described in section 201(b)(7)(A) of title 23, United States Code.

(c) OTHER FUNDS AND OBLIGATION LIMITATION.—Any funds and obligation limitation transferred under subsection (a) shall be in addition to funds or obligation limitation otherwise made available to the National Park Service under sections 203 and 204 of title 23, United States Code.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now vote on these amendments en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I know of no further debate on these amendments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

If not, the question occurs on agreeing to the amendments en bloc.

The amendments (Nos. 3967, 3992, 4011, 4024, and 4042) were agreed to en bloc.

Ms. COLLINS. 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.

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

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

AMENDMENTS NOS. 3997; 3998; 3933; 4030; 4008; 3920; 3969; 3935, AS MODIFIED; 4038; 4043; 3980; 3944; 3993; 3910; 4005; 4029; AND 4023 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3896

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up en bloc and reported by number: Kirk No. 3997;

Tester No. 3998; Perdue No. 3933; Mikulski No. 4030; Daines No. 4008; Brown No. 3920; Inhofe No. 3969; Boxer No. 3935, as modified; Flake No. 4038; Manchin No. 4043; Flake No. 3980; Feinstein No. 3944; Johnson No. 3993; Klobuchar No. 3910; Heller No. 4005; Durbin No. 4029; and Sasse No. 4023.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the amendments by number.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Maine [Ms. COLLINS], for others, proposes amendments numbered 3997; 3998; 3933; 4030; 4008; 3920; 3969; 3935, as modified; 4038; 4043; 3980; 3944; 3993; 3910; 4005; 4029; and 4023 en bloc to amendment No. 3896.

The amendments are as follows:

AMENDMENT NO. 3997

(Purpose: To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide for the inspection of medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

SEC. 251. INSPECTION OF KITCHENS AND FOOD SERVICE AREAS AT MEDICAL FACILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and not less frequently than annually thereafter, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide for the conduct of inspections of kitchens and food service areas at each medical facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that the same standards for kitchens and food service areas at hospitals in the private sector are being met at kitchens and food service areas at medical facilities of the Department.

(b) AGREEMENT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall seek to enter into an agreement with the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations under which the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations conducts the inspections required under subsection (a).

(2) ALTERNATE ORGANIZATION.—If the Secretary is unable to enter into an agreement described in paragraph (1) with the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations on terms acceptable to the Secretary, the Secretary shall seek to enter into such an agreement with another appropriate organization that—

(A) is not part of the Federal Government;

(B) operates as a not-for-profit entity; and

(C) has expertise and objectivity comparable to that of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations.

(c) REMEDIATION PLAN.—

(1) INITIAL FAILURE.—If a kitchen or food service area of a medical facility of the Department is determined pursuant to an inspection conducted under subsection (a) not to meet the standards for kitchens and food service areas in hospitals in the private sector, that medical facility fails the inspection and the Secretary shall—

(A) implement a remediation plan for that medical facility within 48 hours; and

(B) Conduct a second inspection under subsection (a) at that medical facility within 7 days of the failed inspection.

(2) SECOND FAILURE.—If a medical facility of the Department fails the second inspection conducted under paragraph (1)(B), the Secretary shall close the kitchen or food service area at that medical facility that did not meet the standards for kitchens and food

service areas in hospitals in the private sector until remediation is completed and all kitchens and food service areas at that medical facility meet such standards.

(3) PROVISION OF FOOD.—If a kitchen or food service area is closed at a medical facility of the Department pursuant to paragraph (2), the Director of the Veterans Integrated Service Network in which the medical facility is located shall enter into a contract with a vendor approved by the General Services Administration to provide food at the medical facility.

(d) REPORTS.—

(1) QUARTERLY.—Not less frequently than quarterly, the Director of each Veterans Integrated Service Network shall submit to Congress a report on inspections conducted under this section during that quarter at medical facilities of the Department under the jurisdiction of that Director.

(2) SUBSEQUENT PERIOD.—A Director of a Veterans Integrated Service Network may submit to Congress the report described in paragraph (1) not less frequently than semi-annually if the Director does not report any failed inspections for the one-year period preceding the submittal of the report.

SEC. 252. INSPECTION OF MOLD ISSUES AT MEDICAL FACILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, and not less frequently than annually thereafter, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide for the inspection of mold issues at medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(b) AGREEMENT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall seek to enter into an agreement with the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations under which the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations conducts the inspections required under subsection (a).

(2) ALTERNATE ORGANIZATION.—If the Secretary is unable to enter into an agreement described in paragraph (1) with the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations on terms acceptable to the Secretary, the Secretary shall seek to enter into such an agreement with another appropriate organization that—

(A) is not part of the Federal Government;

(B) operates as a not-for-profit entity; and

(C) has expertise and objectivity comparable to that of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospital Organizations.

(c) REMEDIATION PLAN.—If a medical facility of the Department is determined pursuant to an inspection conducted under subsection (a) to have a mold issue, the Secretary shall—

(1) implement a remediation plan for that medical facility within 48 hours; and

(2) Conduct a second inspection under subsection (a) at that medical facility within 90 days of the initial inspection.

(d) REPORTS.—

(1) QUARTERLY.—Not less frequently than quarterly, the Director of each Veterans Integrated Service Network shall submit to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Congress a report on inspections conducted under this section during that quarter at medical facilities of the Department under the jurisdiction of that Director.

(2) SUBSEQUENT PERIOD.—A Director of a Veterans Integrated Service Network may submit to Congress the report described in paragraph (1) not less frequently than semi-annually if the Director does not report any mold issues for the one-year period preceding the submittal of the report.

AMENDMENT NO. 3998

(Purpose: To provide for coverage under the beneficiary travel program of the Department of Veterans Affairs of certain disabled veterans for travel in connection with certain special disabilities rehabilitation)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

SEC. 251. COVERAGE UNDER DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS BENEFICIARY TRAVEL PROGRAM OF TRAVEL IN CONNECTION WITH CERTAIN SPECIAL DISABILITIES REHABILITATION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 111(b)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

“(G) A veteran with vision impairment, a veteran with a spinal cord injury or disorder, or a veteran with double or multiple amputations whose travel is in connection with care provided through a special disabilities rehabilitation program of the Department (including programs provided by spinal cord injury centers, blind rehabilitation centers, and prosthetics rehabilitation centers) if such care is provided—

“(i) on an in-patient basis; or

“(ii) during a period in which the Secretary provides the veteran with temporary lodging at a facility of the Department to make such care more accessible to the veteran.”.

(b) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on the beneficiary travel program under section 111 of title 38, United States Code, as amended by subsection (a), that includes the following:

(1) The cost of the program.

(2) The number of veterans served by the program.

(3) Such other matters as the Secretary considers appropriate.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall take effect on the first day of the first fiscal year that begins after the date of the enactment of this Act.

AMENDMENT NO. 3933

(Purpose: To require a report on modernizing and replacing hangers of the Army’s Combat Aviation Brigade)

At the appropriate place in division B, insert the following:

SEC. _____. Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Army shall submit to Congress a report that includes—

(1) a detailed description of the age and condition of the aircraft maintenance hangers of the Army’s Combat Aviation Brigade;

(2) an identification of the most deficient such hangers;

(3) a plan to modernize or replace such hangers; and

(4) a description of the resources required to modernize or replace such hangers.

AMENDMENT NO. 4030

(Purpose: To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide access to therapeutic listening devices to veterans struggling with mental health related problems, substance abuse, or traumatic brain injury)

On page 217, line 4 of Title 2 in Division B, strike the period and insert “: *Provided further*, That the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall provide access to therapeutic listening devices to veterans struggling with mental health related problems, substance abuse, or traumatic brain injury.”

AMENDMENT NO. 4008

(Purpose: To require a report on the use of defense access road funding to build alternate routes for military equipment traveling to missile launch facilities)

At the appropriate place in title I of division B, insert the following:

SEC. _____. Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense shall conduct a study and submit to Congress a report on the use of defense access road funding to build alternate routes for military equipment traveling to missile launch facilities, taking into consideration the location of local populations, security risks, safety, and impacts of weather.

AMENDMENT NO. 3920

(Purpose: To extend the requirement of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit a report on the capacity of the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide for the specialized treatment and rehabilitative needs of disabled veterans)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

EXTENSION OF REQUIREMENT FOR REPORT ON CAPACITY OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO PROVIDE FOR SPECIALIZED TREATMENT AND REHABILITATIVE NEEDS OF DISABLED VETERANS

SEC. 251. Section 1706(b)(5)(A) of title 38, United States Code, is amended, in the first sentence, by striking “through 2008”.

AMENDMENT NO. 3969

(Purpose: To require that amounts be made available to Directors of Veterans Integrated Service Networks to assess, evaluate, and improve the health care delivery by and business operations of medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

SEC. 251. From the amount made available in this title under the heading “Medical Support and Compliance”, up to \$18,000,000 shall be made available for Directors of Veterans Integrated Service Networks to contract with appropriate non-Department of Veterans Affairs entities to assess, evaluate, and improve the health care delivery by and business operations of medical centers of the Department under the jurisdiction of each such Director.

AMENDMENT NO. 3935, AS MODIFIED

(Purpose: To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to treat certain marriage and family therapists as qualified to serve as marriage and family therapists in the Department of Veterans Affairs)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

(a) Not later than 180 days after the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall begin an assessment of whether the hiring of marriage and family therapists trained at Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education accredited institutions is adversely impacting the ability of the Department of Veterans Affairs to hire marriage and family therapists.

(b) The assessment should also include what steps the Department of Veterans Affairs is taking to increase hiring of marriage and family therapists.

(c) Not later than one year after the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit the report to the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees.

AMENDMENT NO. 4038

(Purpose: To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide for the conduct by the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs of an inspection or audit of the use of a grant to renovate a veteran’s cemetery in Guam)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

SEC. 251. Not later than September 30, 2017, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall—

(1) provide for the conduct by the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs of an inspection or audit of the use of Federal award GU1103 in the amount of \$3,265,487 that was awarded in 2013 to renovate a veteran’s cemetery in Guam under the Veterans Cemetery Grants Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including—

(A) an itemized accounting of the use of such award; or

(B) if no such itemized accounting is possible, an explanation of why any amounts in connection with such award are unaccounted for;

(2) submit to the Committee on Appropriations and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Appropriations and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on the results on the inspection or audit conducted under paragraph (1); and

(3) publish the results on the inspection or audit conducted under paragraph (1) on a publicly available Internet website of the Department.

AMENDMENT NO. 4043

(Purpose: To authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to use amounts appropriated under this Act for the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve the veteran-to-staff ratio for each program of rehabilitation conducted under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

SEC. 251. (a) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may use amounts appropriated or otherwise made available in this title to ensure that the ratio of veterans to full-time employment equivalents within any program of rehabilitation conducted under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, does not exceed 125 veterans to one full-time employment equivalent.

(b) Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the programs of rehabilitation conducted under chapter 31 of title 38, United States Code, including—

(1) an assessment of the veteran-to-staff ratio for each such program; and

(2) recommendations for such action as the Secretary considers necessary to reduce the veteran-to-staff ratio for each such program.

AMENDMENT NO. 3980

(Purpose: To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a plan on modernizing the system of the Veterans Health Administration for processing claims by non-Department of Veterans Affairs health care providers for reimbursement for health care provided to veterans under the laws administered by the Secretary)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

SEC. 251. Not later than September 30, 2017, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress a plan on modernizing the

system of the Veterans Health Administration for processing claims by non-Department of Veterans Affairs health care providers for reimbursement for health care provided to veterans under the laws administered by the Secretary.

AMENDMENT NO. 3944

(Purpose: To authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out certain major medical facility projects for which appropriations are being made for fiscal year 2016)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

SEC. 251. AUTHORIZATION OF CERTAIN MAJOR MEDICAL FACILITY PROJECTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

(1) The Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2016, which was passed by the Senate on November 10, 2015, without a single vote cast against the bill, and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 include the following amounts to be appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs:

(A) \$35,000,000 to make seismic corrections to Building 208 at the West Los Angeles Medical Center of the Department in Los Angeles, California, which, according to the Department, is a building that is designated as having an exceptionally high risk of sustaining substantial damage or collapsing during an earthquake.

(B) \$158,000,000 to provide for the construction of a new research building, site work, and demolition at the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

(C) \$161,000,000 to replace Building 133 with a new community living center at the Long Beach Veterans Affairs Medical Center, which, according to the Department, is a building that is designated as having an extremely high risk of sustaining major damage during an earthquake.

(D) \$468,800,000 for construction projects that are critical to the Department for ensuring health care access and safety at medical facilities in Louisville, Kentucky, Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri, Perry Point, Maryland, American Lake, Washington, Alameda, California, and Livermore, California.

(2) The Department is unable to obligate or expend the amounts described in paragraph (1), other than for construction design, because the Department lacks an explicit authorization by an Act of Congress pursuant to section 8104(a)(2) of title 38, United States Code, to carry out the major medical facility projects described in such paragraph.

(3) Among the major medical facility projects described in paragraph (1), three are critical seismic safety projects in California.

(4) Every day that the critical seismic safety projects described in paragraph (3) are delayed increases the risk of a life-threatening building failure in the case of a major seismic event.

(5) According to the United States Geological Survey—

(A) California has more than a 99 percent chance of experiencing an earthquake of magnitude 6.7 or greater in the next 30 years;

(B) even earthquakes of less severity than magnitude 6.7 can cause life threatening damage to seismically unsafe buildings; and

(C) in California, earthquakes of magnitude 6.0 or greater occur on average once every 1.2 years.

(6) On January 20, 2016, the Senate passed this legislation by unanimous consent as S. 2422, 114th Congress.

(b) AUTHORIZATION.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out the following

major medical facility projects, with each project to be carried out in an amount not to exceed the amount specified for that project:

(1) Seismic corrections to buildings, including retrofitting and replacement of high-risk buildings, in San Francisco, California, in an amount not to exceed \$180,480,000.

(2) Seismic corrections to facilities, including facilities to support homeless veterans, at the medical center in West Los Angeles, California, in an amount not to exceed \$105,500,000.

(3) Seismic corrections to the mental health and community living center in Long Beach, California, in an amount not to exceed \$287,100,000.

(4) Construction of an outpatient clinic, administrative space, cemetery, and columbarium in Alameda, California, in an amount not to exceed \$87,332,000.

(5) Realignment of medical facilities in Livermore, California, in an amount not to exceed \$194,430,000.

(6) Construction of a medical center in Louisville, Kentucky, in an amount not to exceed \$150,000,000.

(7) Construction of a replacement community living center in Perry Point, Maryland, in an amount not to exceed \$92,700,000.

(8) Seismic corrections and other renovations to several buildings and construction of a specialty care building in American Lake, Washington, in an amount not to exceed \$16,260,000.

(c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR CONSTRUCTION.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2016 or the year in which funds are appropriated for the Construction, Major Projects, account, \$1,113,802,000 for the projects authorized in subsection (b).

(d) LIMITATION.—The projects authorized in subsection (b) may only be carried out using—

(1) funds appropriated for fiscal year 2016 pursuant to the authorization of appropriations in subsection (c);

(2) funds available for Construction, Major Projects, for a fiscal year before fiscal year 2016 that remain available for obligation;

(3) funds available for Construction, Major Projects, for a fiscal year after fiscal year 2016 that remain available for obligation;

(4) funds appropriated for Construction, Major Projects, for fiscal year 2016 for a category of activity not specific to a project;

(5) funds appropriated for Construction, Major Projects, for a fiscal year before fiscal year 2016 for a category of activity not specific to a project; and

(6) funds appropriated for Construction, Major Projects, for a fiscal year after fiscal year 2016 for a category of activity not specific to a project.

AMENDMENT NO. 3993

(Purpose: To ensure timely access for Inspectors General to records, documents, and other materials)

At the appropriate place in division B, insert the following:

SEC. _____. (a) None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to deny an Inspector General funded under this Act timely access to any records, documents, or other materials available to the department or agency over which that Inspector General has responsibilities under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), or to prevent or impede that Inspector General's access to such records, documents, or other materials, under any provision of law, except a provision of law that expressly refers to the Inspector General and expressly limits the Inspector General's right of access.

(b) A department or agency covered by this section shall provide its Inspector General with access to all such records, documents, and other materials in a timely manner.

(c) Each Inspector General shall ensure compliance with statutory limitations on disclosure relevant to the information provided by the establishment over which that Inspector General has responsibilities under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.).

(d) Each Inspector General covered by this section shall report to the Committees on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Senate within 5 calendar days any failures to comply with this requirement.

AMENDMENT NO. 3910

(Purpose: To authorize the use of amounts for Medical Services to be used to furnish rehabilitative equipment and human-powered vehicles to certain disabled veterans)

On page 238, line 22, insert after "equipment" the following: "(including rehabilitative equipment for veterans entitled to a prosthetic appliance under chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code, which may include recreational sports equipment that provides an adaption or accommodation for the veteran, regardless of whether such equipment is intentionally designed to be adaptive equipment, such as hand cycles, recumbent bicycles, medically adapted upright bicycles, and upright bicycles)".

AMENDMENT NO. 4005

(Purpose: To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a report on the progress of the Department of Veterans Affairs in completing the Rural Veterans Burial Initiative)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

SEC. 251. Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives a report that contains an update on the progress of the Department of Veterans Affairs in completing the Rural Veterans Burial Initiative and the expected timeline for completion of such initiative.

AMENDMENT NO. 4029

(Purpose: To make funds available to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire Medical Center Directors and employees for other management and clinical positions with vacancies)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

SEC. 251. Of the funds made available in this title for fiscal year 2017 for medical support and compliance, not less than \$21,000,000 shall be made available to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire Medical Center Directors and employees for other management and clinical positions that are critical to the Department of Veterans Affairs in order to fill vacancies in such positions.

AMENDMENT NO. 4023

(Purpose: To protect congressional oversight of the executive branch by ensuring individuals may speak with Congress)

At the end of title II of division B, add the following:

SEC. 251. None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available in this title may be used by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into an agreement related to resolving a dispute or claim with an individual that would restrict in any way the individual from speaking to members of Congress or their staff on any topic not otherwise prohibited from disclosure by Federal law.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now vote on these amendments en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. COLLINS. I know of no further debate on these amendments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

If not, the question is on agreeing to the amendments en bloc.

The amendments (Nos. 3997; 3998; 3933; 4030; 4008; 3920; 3969; 3935, as modified; 4038; 4043; 3980; 3944; 3993; 3910; 4005; 4029; and 4023) were agreed to en bloc.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, at 11:15 a.m. on Thursday, May 19, all postcloture time be considered expired on the Blunt-Murray amendment No. 3900; further, that if cloture is invoked on the Collins substitute amendment No. 3896, the Cornyn amendment No. 3899 and the Nelson amendment No. 3898 be withdrawn; that it be in order for Senator COLLINS or her designee to call up amendment No. 3970, and that there be no second degrees in order to the Collins amendment No. 3970 or the Lee amendment No. 3897.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. COLLINS. For the information of all Senators, at 11:15 a.m. tomorrow, the Senate is expected to proceed to three rollcall votes: a motion to waive the budget with respect to the Blunt-Murray Zika amendment, adoption of the Blunt amendment, and cloture on the pending substitute. Senators should expect additional votes to complete action on the bill and any pending amendments during tomorrow's session of the Senate.

MORNING BUSINESS

CBO COST ESTIMATE—S. 329

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, in compliance with paragraph 11(a) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources has obtained from the Congressional Budget Office an estimate of the costs of S. 329, Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Wild and Scenic River Act, as reported from the committee. The full estimate is available on CBO's Web site, www.cbo.gov.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the summary of the estimate be printed in the RECORD.

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

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

S. 329—LOWER FARMINGTON RIVER AND SALMON BROOK WILD AND SCENIC RIVER ACT (January 15, 2016)

S. 329 would designate segments of the Lower Farmington Rivers and Salmon Brook in Connecticut as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Under the legislation, the National Park Service

(NPS) would administer the river segments in partnership with an advisory committee composed of local representatives. Based on the cost of similar management partnerships in the region, CBO estimates that NPS would provide about \$170,000 annually to the advisory committee to manage the river segments. Thus, CBO estimates that implementing the bill would cost about \$1 million over the 2016-2020 period; such spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

Enacting S. 329 would not affect direct spending or revenues; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply. CBO estimates that enacting S. 329 would not increase net direct spending or on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year period beginning in 2026.

S. 329 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Marin Burnett. The estimate was approved by H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.

CBO COST ESTIMATE—S. 556

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, in compliance with paragraph 11(a) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources has obtained from the Congressional Budget Office an estimate of the costs of S. 556, Sportsmen's Act of 2015, as reported from the committee. The full estimate is available on CBO's Web site, www.cbo.gov.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the summary of the cost estimate be printed in the RECORD.

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

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

S. 556—SPORTSMEN'S ACT OF 2015 (May 18, 2016)

Summary: S. 556 would amend existing laws and establish new laws related to the management of federal lands. It would authorize the sale of certain federal land and permit the proceeds from those sales to be spent. The bill also would establish a fund to carry out deferred maintenance projects on lands administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and would permanently authorize the transfer of funds to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

CBO estimates that enacting the bill would increase both direct spending and offsetting receipts (which are treated as reductions in direct spending) by \$65 million and \$80 million respectively over the 2017-2026 period; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures apply. Enacting S. 556 would not affect revenues. Based on information from the affected agencies, CBO also estimates that implementing the legislation would cost \$486 million over the 2017-2021 period, assuming appropriation of the amounts authorized to be deposited into the NPS Maintenance and Revitalization Fund.

CBO estimates that enacting S. 556 would not increase net direct spending or on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2027.

S. 556 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA) and would benefit state, local, and tribal agen-

cies by authorizing federal grants to support conservation, historic preservation, and recreational activities. Any costs would be incurred by those entities, including matching contributions, would be incurred voluntarily.

CBO COST ESTIMATE—S. 782

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, in compliance with paragraph 11(a) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources has obtained from the Congressional Budget Office an estimate of the costs of S. 782, Grand Canyon Bison Management Act, as reported from the committee. The full estimate is available on CBO's Web site, www.cbo.gov.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the summary of the cost estimate be printed in the RECORD.

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

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

S. 782—GRAND CANYON BISON MANAGEMENT ACT (January 8, 2016)

S. 782 would require the National Park Service (NPS) to publish a management plan to humanely reduce the population of bison in the Grand Canyon National Park within 180 days of enactment of the legislation. Based on information provided by the NPS, CBO expects that publishing the management plan within that timeframe would require the agency to expedite its ongoing planning process and increase discretionary costs by an insignificant amount.

Enacting S. 782 would not affect direct spending or revenues; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply. CBO estimates that enacting S. 782 would not increase net direct spending or on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year period beginning in 2026.

S. 782 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would not affect the budgets of state, local, or tribal governments.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Marin Burnett. The estimate was approved by H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.

CBO COST ESTIMATE—S. 1592

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, in compliance with paragraph 11(a) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources has obtained from the Congressional Budget Office an estimate of the costs of 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, as reported from the committee. The full estimate is available on CBO's Web site, www.cbo.gov.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the summary of the cost estimate be printed in the RECORD.

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